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ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2004

REPORT

SUBMITTED TO THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

OF THE

U.S. SENATE

AND THE

COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

OF THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BY THE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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

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NOVEMBER 2004

Printed for the use of the Committees on Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate and International Relations of the U.S. House of Representatives, respectively

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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.

RICHARD G. LUGAR,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations.

HENRY HYDE,
Chairman, Committee on International Relations.

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
WASHINGTON, DC.

Hon. RICHARD G. LUGAR,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations,
U.S. Senate.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN:

On behalf of Secretary of State Colin Powell, I am very pleased to transmit to Congress the *Annual Report on Religious Freedom 2004.* This report is prepared in compliance with Section 102 of the International Religious Freedom Act. It covers events from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004.

We sincerely hope that this report is helpful. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

PAUL V. KELLY,
Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs.

Enclosure.

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, the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs, we wish to recognize Jared Banks, Cynthia Bunton, Joshua Davis, Doug Dearborn, Solange Garvey, Mitchell Guttman, Linda Hayes, Victor Huser, David Jones, Karla Jones, Paige Krause, Leonel Miranda, Shannon Noble, Jennifer Pekkinen, LeRoy Potts, Larkin Reynolds, Ereni Roess, Andrea Schwartz, Kimber Shearer, Alison Silber, Sharita Smith, Sarai Stewart, Ross Taggart, Julie Turner, and Tanika Willis.

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In the Office of International Religious Freedom, the following people deserve recognition for their part in preparing this report: David Abramson, Renee Cotton, Todd Deatherage, Kenneth Durkin, Whitney Ford, Nancy Hewett, William Inboden, Shellette Jackson, Mina Khalil, Christina Lopez, Janet Mayland, Joannella Morales, Rebecca Riggs, Sasha Ross, Whitney Sado, Iman Shebaro, Stephanie Wolfe, and David Young.

PREFACE

2004 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 "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 August 1993, the Secretary of State moved to strengthen the human rights efforts of our embassies. All sections in each embassy were asked to contribute information and to corroborate reports of human rights violations, and new efforts were made to link mission programming to the advancement of human rights and democracy. In 1994 the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs was reorganized and renamed as the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, reflecting both a broader sweep and a more focused approach to the interlocking issues of human rights, worker rights, and democracy. In 1998 the Secretary of State established the Office of International Religious Freedom. In May 2002, John V. Hanford, III was sworn in as the second Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

The 2004 Report covers the period from July 1, 2003, to June 30, 2004, 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.

After the embassies completed their drafts, the texts were sent to Washington for careful review by the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs and the Office of International Religious Freedom, both in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. They worked closely with other State Department Offices and the Office of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, who has ultimate responsibility for the Report on behalf of the Secretary of State. As they worked to corroborate, analyze, and edit the reports, the Department officers drew on 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. Govern-

ment'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

As has often been observed, America was founded, in significant measure, by persons fleeing religious persecution and seeking a haven where they could live out their faith without fear of government interference or reprisal. Today, religious freedom remains for many Americans the most treasured of human rights, because it represents the very freedom to seek, know, and serve God according to the dictates of one's own conscience. Our nation's impulse to protect and champion this freedom is born of our history, is strengthened by our resolve to advance all fundamental human rights, and is enriched by the priority which many Americans continue to place on the importance of religious faith in their own lives.

What is less often acknowledged is that there are many nations and cultures around the world where religious freedom is equally valued as precious—indeed where large portions of populations would say that their freedom to believe and worship is their most vital and indispensable right. It is this aspiration that we seek to serve in this, the sixth annual International Religious Freedom Report.

The first edition of this report, in 1999, declared that "while religion can be a source of conflict, religious freedom—the right to pursue one's faith without interference—can be a cornerstone of human dignity and of all human rights—To cry out against the torture of people because of their religion, to demand the release of those imprisoned for religious belief, to insist that religious minorities be protected—these are not simply actions on behalf of the oppressed. They are also actions to indemnify a precious and universal right."

As much as those words articulated the holistic priority of religious freedom, they also sounded a caution against the persecution of religious believers and the distortion of religion. Today, as at other times in history, some of the greatest threats to both our national security and to international peace define and even justify their violence in religious terms. This report, in advocating civil societies based on the respect of religious freedom, offers a compelling alternative.

The promise of religious freedom stands in stark, enduring contrast to the peril of religious extremism. Religious extremists cling desperately to the idea that religion demands the death of innocents and the destruction of liberty. We hold confidently to the idea that religious freedom respects the life of all and the cultivation of human dignity. While religious terrorism dictates violent intolerance, religious freedom encourages peaceful coexistence. What religious extremism demands as the iron rule of the state, religious freedom reserves for the sanctity of the individual conscience. Where religious terrorism defiles the sacred, religious freedom honors the sacred.

This is seen in practice as much as in principle. Nations that respect religious freedom rarely pose a security threat to their neighbors. Nations that protect religious pluralism defuse the appeal of religious intolerance and its violent corollary, religious terrorism. Nations that affirm religious liberty also lay a cornerstone of democracy and rule of law. For these reasons alone, promoting religious freedom is as much in our national interest as it is our national ideal. As we continue our efforts to shape a more secure, just, and peaceful world, religious freedom holds a prominent place.

And so religious freedom endures as an ideal, even while threats to it never cease. Though naturally endowed in all people, freedom does not occur naturally in the world. History bears abundant witness to the enduring tension between freedom's resilience as a natural aspiration of the human heart, and freedom's fragility in the reality of human life. While the number of people living in freedom around the world today is strong and growing, too many others still suffer under oppressive regimes, authoritarian rulers, and intolerant systems. Freedom may be a reality for many, but it remains still only a dream for too many others.

Our own nation's founders well understood this paradox. Thus could the Declaration of Independence affirm the transcendence of freedom as a right of all people "endowed by their Creator," in all times and places, while at the same time pro-

testing the too familiar tyranny which oppressed so many. Thus could President Lincoln declare that the Declaration promised "liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time." And thus can President Bush affirm, "Freedom is not America's gift to the world. It is God's gift to humanity."

In short, religious freedom is a hallmark of our nation's history, and it is a blessing that we seek to share. "Almighty God hath created the mind free," declared Thomas Jefferson in introducing the landmark Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, "and the rights hereby asserted are the natural rights of mankind." Such natural rights are not confined to Americans, nor should they be. This is one reason why Franklin Delano Roosevelt further enshrined this commitment as a national priority and international goal. In January 1941, as much of the world lay in chains or in peril and the war in Europe and Asia ominously approached our nation's door, he responded not just with economic and security assistance but also with the promise of the "Four Freedoms." One of these "essential human freedoms," he proclaimed, is the "freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world."

Our own nation's history has not been perfect, nor do we claim to be so today. We continue to strive, at home and abroad, to uphold religious freedom as the universal right that it is. The spiritual longings of the human heart have an innate dignity all their own, deserving our respect and demanding our protection.

THE ANNUAL REPORT

While religious freedom has come to be appreciated more and more as a universal principle, in too many countries today it is honored only in the breach. This report represents, in tangible form, the U.S. Government's ongoing efforts to help translate religious freedom from an ideal to a reality. It is one measure to bridge the divide between principle and practice. It combines analysis with endeavor. It details the legal situation, cultural context, and relevant policies, and it also describes efforts taken by the United States Government to oppose religious persecution and promote religious freedom. We do not confine our reporting to the negative. Many countries display an admirable respect for religious freedom, while other countries continue to improve in policy and practice. They are described here as well, and they bear witness to what is possible.

Yet the challenge remains, and must be met. Many people continue to suffer for the belief or practice of their faith, and many governments refuse to recognize or protect this natural and universal right. That religious believers willingly endure beatings, torture, imprisonment, and even death is a bracing reminder of the resilience of faith. That we can tell in this report of their plight and their perseverance is a testament to their courage.

In 1998, Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act, which, among other things, commissioned this report, and created an office at the State Department with the mandate of integrating religious freedom advocacy into our foreign policy. President Bush has maintained this commitment, stating in his National Security Strategy that the U.S. Government will "take special efforts to promote freedom of religion and conscience and defend it from encroachment by repressive governments."

THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Office of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom has now completed its sixth year. The Office has the simple yet daunting mission of promoting religious freedom worldwide. The Ambassador is charged with the responsibility of serving as the principal advisor to the President and the Secretary of State on matters of international religious freedom.

The Ambassador and his staff monitor the worldwide status of religious persecution and discrimination and devise strategies to reduce abuses. Just as importantly, they develop strategies to promote religious freedom, both to attack the root causes of persecution and as a means of advancing other fundamental U.S. interests, such as protecting other core human rights, encouraging the growth of mature democracies, and furthering the war against terrorism.

These strategies are carried out in a variety of ways, using the range of diplomatic tools available, including both formal and informal bilateral negotiations with foreign government authorities; participation in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe; cooperation with human rights and faith-based NGOs; and meetings with victims of persecution. Often the Ambassador and staff, along with other U.S. officials, engage in direct intervention in particular crises in order to remove people of faith from harm's way or to forestall further persecution.

In all cases, the Office, which is staffed with experienced Foreign Service and Civil Service officers, works closely with its counterparts elsewhere in the State Department, the U.S. Government, and in U.S. missions overseas. U.S. Foreign Service officers abroad form the front line of our religious freedom policy. Many of their activities, and those of the Office of International Religious Freedom, are discussed in Part III of the Executive Summary. Some of their most heroic actions, however, must necessarily remain out of the spotlight in order to protect those involved.As I continue my term as the second Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, I wish to thank all the employees of the Department of State here and abroad who have made this report possible. In particular, I want to acknowledge the dedicated work of our human rights officers throughout the world, as well as the members of the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs at the State Department, who have worked long and hard to craft this report. I also want to express appreciation for the vigilant and bipartisan support that Congress has demonstrated on this issue. In addition, a debt of gratitude is owed to so many who work on behalf of the oppressed in non-governmental organizations. We rely on their on-the-ground reporting and extensive network of contacts to ensure that our report is as fair, accurate, and comprehensive as possible. Finally, I wish to thank my own staff in the Office of International Religious Freedom, whose commitment to religious freedom for all people is both indefatigable and inspiring.

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2004

Religious liberty lies at the heart of a just and free society. Enshrined as both a foundational American value and a universal principle, the right to freedom of religion is also a cornerstone of democracy. It is a vital measure in the creation and maintenance of a stable political system. Conversely, the failure to protect freedom of religion and other fundamental human rights can undermine social order, foster extremism, and lead to instability and violence. Assessing the status of religious freedom can often serve as one helpful diagnostic for the overall health and stability of a nation. For these reasons and others, promoting religious freedom continues to be an essential element of United States foreign policy. President Bush has observed that "successful societies guarantee religious liberty," and the Administration's National Security Strategy declares that the U.S. will "take special efforts to promote freedom of religion and conscience and defend it from encroachment by repressive governments."

The United States is not alone in this commitment. Religious freedom is a universal value, and almost all of the world's nations have signed one or more international agreements committing them to respect individual freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Beginning with the 1948 adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and continuing with the nearly global ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the nations of the world have affirmed the principle that governments have a fundamental responsibility to protect freedom of religion. (*See* Appendices A and B for the texts of these documents.) In practice, however, this freedom is often restricted, abused or denied, and many people continue to suffer solely for following the dictates of conscience.

Ultimately, each nation's policies and practices regarding religious freedom must be measured against international norms. The United States acknowledges its own responsibility with respect to these norms in the safeguarding and protection of religious liberty.

In this summary of the status of religious freedom around the world, we examine barriers to religious freedom, note countries where religious freedom conditions have improved, and describe U.S. actions to promote international religious freedom. Millions of people around the world live under totalitarian or authoritarian regimes where religious belief and practice are tightly controlled. Some countries have discriminatory laws or policies that disadvantage certain religions; others are negligent in ensuring that religious minorities or adherents of "unapproved" religions do not suffer discrimination or persecution. Others stigmatize certain religions by wrongfully associating them with dangerous "cults" or "sects."

Sometimes intolerance has several components, including a religious dimension. Anti-Semitism, for example, touches on both religious discrimination and ethnic discrimination, and it continues to be a problem of great concern to the U.S. Government and the international community. This year's report shows a disturbing increase in anti-Semitism in several European countries, as well as ongoing anti-Semitism in many predominantly Muslim countries. To address this issue, in April the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) hosted in Berlin a second conference on anti-Semitism, in which Secretary of State Powell participated. As a result of these conferences, the OSCE is implementing a process to monitor and report in a consistent manner on anti-Semitic incidents. These conferences were the first multilateral gatherings devoted solely to this subject and also the first to deal with anti-Semitism as a human rights issue.

It should be noted that there is no Iraq report in this year's submission. In keeping with State Department precedent, we do not report on our own governance but welcome the scrutiny of other responsible reporters. The reporting period ends on June 30, which roughly coincides with the date of the transfer of power from the

Coalition Provisional Authority to the Iraqi Interim Government. In June, the Secretary acted to remove Iraq's designation as a "Country of Particular Concern" for its severe violations of religious freedom under the regime of Saddam Hussein. The Transitional Administrative Law, ratified in March, includes provisions for freedom of religion, including the right to "freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice." Early next year, the Department will release its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, which will include a section on religious freedom in Iraq from the transfer of power to the Iraqi Interim Government through the end of 2004.

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, even though serious problems may remain in those countries. Part III lists noteworthy actions the U.S. Government has taken 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 content. The practice of religion is often seen as a threat to the state's ideology or the government's power. Oftentimes, the state suppresses religions based on the ethnic character of the religious 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. It systemically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom, discouraged or prohibited minority religions from constructing new places of worship, and in some ethnic minority areas coercively promoted Buddhism over other religions, particularly among members of ethnic minority groups. Christian groups in most regions continued to experience difficulties in obtaining permission to repair existing churches or to build new ones, while Muslims reported they essentially were banned from constructing new mosques or expanding existing ones anywhere in the country. Anti-Muslim violence continued to occur, Muslim activities were monitored, and the Government restricted the ability of Muslims to worship and travel freely.

China. 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. Particularly severe violations of religious freedom continued. Members of many unregistered religious groups, including Protestant and Catholic groups, were subjected to restrictions, including intimidation, harassment, and detention; however, the degree of restrictions varied significantly from region to region. In some localities, "underground" religious leaders reported ongoing pressure to register with the State Administration for Religious Activities. Spiritual activities in churches that have not registered may be considered illegal, and participants can be punished. 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. The arrest, detention and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps, and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Christian-based groups that the Government considered "cults" were subjected to increased government scrutiny. In areas where unrest has occurred, especially among the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang Province, officials continued to restrict the building of mosques and the training of clergy, and they prohibited the teaching of Islam to children. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief in Tibetan areas, they promptly and forcibly suppress activities they

view as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, such as religious activities venerating the Dalai Lama.

Cuba. The Ministry of Interior continues to control and monitor religious activities and to use surveillance, infiltration and harassment against religious groups, clergy and laypersons. The Government monitors all religious groups, including registered and established institutions. Government harassment of private houses of worship continued, with evangelical denominations reporting evictions from houses used for worship. The authorities restrict the import and distribution of religious literature and materials, and they monitor church-run publications. The law allows for the construction of new churches once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government has almost never authorized construction permits, forcing many churches to seek permits to meet in private homes. Religious groups must also obtain a permit to reconstruct or repair existing places of worship. The process of obtaining a permit and purchasing construction materials from government outlets is lengthy and expensive. The church is not permitted to train or transfer from abroad enough priests for its needs, nor is it allowed to establish social institutions, including schools and universities, hospitals and clinics, and nursing homes.

Laos. Authorities in some areas continued to display intolerance for minority religions, particularly Protestant denominations. There were reports of local officials pressuring minority Christians to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages. There were also several instances of persons detained or arrested for their religious faith in Savannakhet and Attapeu provinces. There were two known religious prisoners, both members of the Lao Evangelical Church, the country's domestic Protestant Christian church. Although in theory the Prime Minister's Decree on Religious Practice provides a mechanism for new religious denominations to register, the Government's desire to consolidate religious practice for control purposes has effectively blocked registration of new denominations. Persons arrested for their religious activities have been charged with exaggerated security or other criminal offenses. Persons detained may be held for lengthy periods without trial, and an accused person's defense rights are limited. A person arrested or convicted for religious offenses has little protection under the law.

North Korea. Genuine religious freedom does not exist, and particularly severe violations of religious freedom continued. The regime has severely repressed unauthorized religious groups in recent years; there are unconfirmed reports of the killing of members of underground Christian churches. In addition, religious persons who proselytize or who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating in the People's Republic of China appear subject to arrest and harsh penalties, according to several unconfirmed reports. Defectors interviewed by a former humanitarian aid worker claimed that Christians were imprisoned and tortured for reading the Bible and talking about God and that some Christians were subjected to biological warfare experiments. The Government effectively bars outside observers from confirming these reports.

Vietnam. Respect for religious freedom remained poor or deteriorated for some groups, notably ethnic minority Protestants and some independent Buddhists, though it slightly improved for many practitioners. The Government continued to restrict significantly those publicly organized activities of religious groups that were not recognized by the Government. Oversight of recognized religions and harassment of followers of non-recognized religions varied from locality to locality, often as a result of varying local interpretations of national policy. Religious groups faced restrictions on training and ordaining clergy and on conducting educational and humanitarian activities. There have been credible reports for several years that local officials have continued to pressure many ethnic minority Protestants to recant their faith. According to credible reports, the police arbitrarily detained and sometimes beat religious believers, particularly in the mountainous ethnic minority areas. During the period covered by this report, one Protestant leader in the Northwest Highlands was reportedly beaten to death for refusing to recant his faith. In October 2003, authorities detained ten leaders of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, including two who had been freed from detention a few months earlier, after they held an organizational meeting without government permission in Binh Dinh Province. In 2003 the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and Government moved more formally to recognize and more fully to support the role of "legal" religious activity in society. At the same time, the CPV cited the overriding importance of "national unity" to assert more explicitly its control over religious groups.

STATE HOSTILITY TOWARD MINORITY OR NON-APPROVED RELIGIONS

Some governments, while not implementing full control over minority religions, nevertheless are hostile and repressive to certain ones, or identify religious groups as "security threats." These governments implement policies designed to intimidate and harass certain religious groups, demand adherents to recant their faith, or cause religious group members to flee the country.

Eritrea. The Government's poor respect for religious freedom continued to worsen during the period covered by this report. The Government monitored, harassed, arrested, and detained members of Pentecostal, independent Evangelical groups, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses. There were numerous credible reports that over 400 members of non-sanctioned religious groups had been detained or imprisoned. Government restrictions make it difficult to determine the precise number of current religious prisoners, but it is likely more than 200. Prisoners of conscience are often subjected to inhumane treatment that includes poor living conditions and abuse. There were also numerous reports of physical torture and attempts at forced recantations. The Government denied visa applications for clergy who applied to travel to the country to meet with their congregations. Following a May 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 sanctioned religious groups—Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Catholics, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. These closures, the Government's refusal to authorize any registrations, and the restriction on holding religious meetings continued through the period covered by this report.

Iran. The Government engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Members of the country's religious minorities—including Sunni Muslims, Baha'is, Jews, and Christians—reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. All religious minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing. Baha'is may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with co-religionists abroad. They are subject to harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary arrest. While three Baha'is were released from prison (two upon the completion of lengthy prison sentences), one remained in state custody. Authorities initiated the destruction of two Baha'i holy sites. 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 threatening atmosphere for the small community. The Government vigilantly enforces its prohibition on proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians by closing evangelical churches and arresting converts. Government harassment has included conspicuous monitoring outside Christian premises by Revolutionary Guards to discourage Muslims or converts from entering church premises, and demands for the presentation of the identity papers of worshippers inside. Sunni Muslims encounter religious discrimination at the local, provincial and national levels, and there were reports of discrimination against practitioners of the Sufi tradition.

Pakistan. The Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. The Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam and imposes some elements of Islamic law on both Muslims and religious minorities. The Government fails in many respects to protect the rights of religious minorities. There were instances in which the Government failed to intervene in cases of societal violence directed at minority religious groups. The lack of an adequate government response contributed to an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities. Relations between different religious groups frequently were tense, acts of sectarian and religious violence continued, and more than 100 deaths were attributed to sectarian violence during the period covered by this report. The worst religious violence was directed against the country's Shi'a minority, which continued to be disproportionately the victims of individual and mass killings. Human rights groups report that there have been incidents in which persons from minority groups, especially Hindus and Christians, have been abducted and forcibly converted.

Saudi Arabia. Freedom of religion does not exist. Freedom of religion 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. Citizens are denied the freedom to choose or change their beliefs. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. Muslims who do not adhere to the officially sanctioned Salafi (commonly called "Wahhabi") tradition can face severe repercussions at the hands of Mutawwa'in (religious police). Members of the Shi'a minority

continue 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. Religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society continued during the period covered by this report, including ongoing denunciations of non-Muslim religions from government-sanctioned pulpits. There were frequent instances in which mosque preachers, whose salaries were paid by the government, used violent anti-Jewish and anti-Christian language in their sermons. 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. Proselytizing by non-Muslims, including the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials such as Bibles, is illegal.

Sudan. The Government continues to engage in particularly severe violations of religious freedom. There are many restrictions on non-Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, and Muslims from tribes or sects not associated with the ruling party. The Government came into power by a coup in 1989 with a goal of Islamization and treats Islam as a state religion that must inspire the country's laws, institutions, and policies. Applications to build mosques generally are granted; however, the process for applications to build churches is more difficult. The Guidance and Endowment Minister has denied building permits to most non-Muslim religious groups, alleging that local restrictions prohibit building places of worship in residential neighbourhoods. The last permit was issued around 1975. Many non-Muslims state 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 and non-Muslims. There were also reports that some conversions took place in order to secure jobs and access to social support services, which were largely available only through Islamic charities. In the west in the three Darfur states, a war between government-supported Arab Muslim militias and African Muslims continued throughout the reporting period, resulting in ethnic cleansing and redistribution of African Muslim populations in the region. There were reports that mosques belonging to African Muslims were destroyed in the conflict. That said, the conflict in Darfur is primarily an ethnic and racial conflict.

Turkmenistan. The Government continued to maintain tight control over the practice of religion, despite the presidential decrees signed in March and May that weakened a more restrictive Law on Religion passed in November 2003. The Government controls the leadership appointments of Russian Orthodox and Sunni Muslim groups. The Committee on Religious Affairs must approve all religious instruction. Local imams are forbidden from teaching Islamic theology; it may only be taught at the Theological College at Turkmen State University. The Government treats participation in or sponsorship of nontraditional religions as a potential threat to national security, making all groups coordinate their contact with all foreigners through the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nonregistered congregations are prohibited from gathering publicly, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials. The law restricts the freedom to meet and to worship in private. The Government imposed a number of financial penalties on religious groups attempting to meet for worship, though there have been no reports of fines imposed since April. By the end of the period covered by this report, Government respect for religious freedom had improved. The restrictive law had been changed to permit the registration of four minority religious groups. Changes in Government policy toward minority religions have engendered a noticeable reduction in harassment of minority congregations.

Uzbekistan. The Government continued to commit numerous serious abuses of religious freedom. The Government permitted the operation of what it considers mainstream religions but invoked the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations to restrict the religious freedom of other groups. This law contravenes internationally recognized norms, and its registration requirements for religious organizations are strict and burdensome, though Christian churches generally are tolerated as long as they do not attempt to win converts among ethnic Uzbeks. The law prohibits or severely restricts activities such as proselytizing, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering private religious instruction, and there are stiff civil and criminal penalties for violating this law. The Government continued its campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups it suspected of extremist sentiments or activities, arresting numerous alleged members of these groups and sentencing them to lengthy jail terms. Individuals arrested on suspicion of extremism often face particularly severe mistreatment in custody, including torture. During the

period covered by this report, the Government released 704 individuals as part of a large-scale amnesty, and the number arrested continued to decline through the end of 2003. However, following a series of terrorist incidents in late March and early April, the Government took into custody up to two hundred individuals; the overwhelming majority of detainees were identified as having belonged to Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamic political party, or other so-called "Wahabbi" groups. Terrorist charges aside, as in previous years, a large percentage of those taken into custody on charges of extremism were arrested arbitrarily. This campaign led authorities to be highly suspicious of those who were among the most observant, including frequent mosque attendees, bearded men, and veiled women, creating a climate of intimidation and fear for some devout believers. 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 Uzbeks reported operating in a climate of harassment and fear.

STATE NEGLECT OF SOCIETAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST, OR PERSECUTION OF, MINORITY RELIGIONS

Some countries have legislation that discourages religious discrimination and persecution but fail to prevent conflicts, harassment or other harmful acts. Others do not respond with consistency and vigor to violations of religious freedom by nongovernmental entities or local law enforcement officials.

Bangladesh. 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. Human rights activists report an increase in religiously motivated violence. Religious minorities remain underrepresented in most government jobs, especially at the higher levels of the civil and foreign services. There were numerous reports of discrimination or violence against religious minorities; some (but not all) could be verified independently. The Government sometimes has failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who are often local gang leaders. Some foreign missionaries reported that internal security forces closely monitored their activities. The law neither permits citizens to proselytize nor prohibits proselytization; however, local authorities and communities often object to efforts to convert persons from Islam to other religions. Anti-Semitic attitudes are widespread among some Islamist activists and are sometimes evident in newspaper commentaries.

Egypt. The government continued to try citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs. The Government denied identity papers, birth certificates, and marriage licenses to members of the Baha'i community. There were numerous complaints of delayed church constructions. Christians are discriminated against in the public sector and in staff appointments to public universities. Christians were refused admission to Al-Azhar University, a publicly funded institution. Those accused of proselytizing have been harassed by police or arrested on charges of violating the penal code that prohibits the ridiculing or insulting of heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife. The Government does not recognize conversions from Islam to Christianity or other religions. Mosque and church repairs are now subject to the same laws, but enforcement of the laws appears to be much stricter for churches than for mosques. Incidents of blocked or delayed permits vary, often depending on the attitude of local security officials and the governor toward the church. There are credible reports of government harassment or lack of cooperation with Christian families that attempt to regain custody of their daughters in cases of marriage between an underage Christian girl and a Muslim boy. There were credible reports that three of four Shi'a Muslims arrested in December and held without charge were tortured in detention. In January, the Government established a National Human Rights Council with a Coptic Christian as its head. 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 2000 sectarian strife in al-Kush. The government failed to bring to justice those responsible for the murder of the 21 Christians killed in that conflict.

Georgia. Before the transfer of power in November, local police and security officials at times failed to protect nontraditional religious minority groups. The Georgian Orthodox church 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. Some members of nontraditional faiths were restricted in their worship by threats, intimidation, and the use of force by ultra-conservative Orthodox extremists whom

the previous Government at times failed to control. On a number of occasions under the previous government, local police and security officials harassed non-Orthodox religious groups, particularly local and foreign missionaries, including members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Hare Krishnas. Because of the continuing violence against them, Jehovah's Witnesses have refrained from public meetings in favor of gathering in private homes. For six weeks, protesters blockaded a home in Tbilisi to prevent Russian-speaking Pentecostals from attending worship services in the home. The USG repeatedly asked officials in the previous government to arrest the leader of the violent movement against minority religious groups, a de-frocked Orthodox priest, Basili Mkalavishvili. The new government arrested him in March, which has improved the situation noticeably for minority religious groups.

Guatemala. There is no government policy of discrimination, but a lack of resources and political will to enforce existing laws and to implement the Peace Accords limits the free expression of indigenous religious practice. Indigenous leaders note that Mayan culture does not receive the official recognition that it is due. The Government has not provided mechanisms for indigenous control of or free access to ceremonial sites considered sacred within indigenous culture. Individuals seeking to practice traditional religious ceremonies in sacred sites must pay an entrance fee or request permission far in advance from the Historical Anthropological Institute (a division of the Ministry of Culture). The Government's use of sacred sites as revenue-generating tourist destinations is considered by some indigenous groups to be an affront to their spiritual rights. In October 2001, the Government swore in the Commission for the Definition of Sacred Places to address such issues. However, the Commission has not taken action to address these indigenous concerns since its inception.

India. The status of religious freedom improved in a number of ways, yet problems remain in some areas. During most of the period covered by this report, the central Government was led by a coalition called the National Democratic Alliance. The leading party in the coalition was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party with links to Hindu extremist groups that have been implicated in violent acts against Christians and Muslims. The BJP-led government sometimes did not act effectively to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This failure resulted in part from the legal constraints inherent in the country's federal structure, and in part from shortcomings in the law enforcement and justice systems. Tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and to an extent between Christians and Hindus, were a problem. Attacks on religious minorities occurred in several states. Some extremists saw ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities as signals that such violence could be committed with impunity. There are anti-conversion laws in several states. In late May, a new coalition, the United Progressive Alliance, came to power and pledged to respect the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance, and to pay particular attention to the rights of religious minorities.

Indonesia. The Government recognizes only five major religions. Persons of other faiths frequently experienced official discrimination, often in the context of civil registration of marriages and births, and the issuance of identity cards. Security forces occasionally tolerated discrimination against and abuse of religious groups by private actors, and the Government at times failed to punish perpetrators. Sectarian clashes claimed at least 46 lives in Central Sulawesi and at least 47 in the Malukus. The Government took steps to halt the surge in violence in the Malukus and Central Sulawesi. Nevertheless, some members of the Christian and Muslim communities in these conflict zones alleged that members of the military and police forces either carried out or supported some attacks.

Nigeria. While the Federal government generally respects religious freedom, there were some instances in which limits were placed on religious activity in order to address security and public safety concerns. Inter-religious tension between Christians and Muslims remained high in some areas of the country, and there were several violent economic-ethnic conflicts that took on religious overtones. Hundreds of people were killed in these clashes. Christians have alleged that Islam has been adopted as the de facto state religion in several northern states. The extension of Shari'a law to cover criminal offenses in many northern states generated a national debate on whether Shari'a punishments, such as amputation, stoning and caning, were considered "torture or inhuman or degrading treatment" under the Constitution. Many states prohibited open-air religious services held away from places of worship due to fears that these religious services would heighten inter-religious ten-

sions or lead to violence. Several northern state governments continued to ban public proselytizing to avoid ethno-religious violence.

Sri Lanka. There was an overall deterioration of religious freedom due to the actions of extremists. In late 2003 and early 2004, Buddhist extremists destroyed Christian churches and harassed and abused pastors and congregants. There were over 100 accounts of attacks on Christian church buildings and members, several dozen of which were confirmed by diplomatic observers. NGOs have reported that in the majority of cases the police failed to protect churches and citizens from attack. In May an MP of the Jathika Hela Urumaya party presented a draft anti-conversion bill to Parliament. In June 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 a review that was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. There has been considerable public discussion of the bills, and many government officials expressed their concern about such legislation.

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 a historical dominance of the majority religion and a bias against new or minority religions. In such countries segments of the citizenry are often skeptical of new religions.

Azerbaijan. Some religious groups reported delays in and denials of registration. Local authorities occasionally monitor religious services, and officials at times harassed nontraditional religious groups and, in particular, the Juma Mosque congregation whose imam, Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, was not approved by the Government-sanctioned Board of Caucasus Muslims. The Baku city government has attempted to use registration as a requirement for occupying the Juma Mosque, which is registered as an historical landmark. In February and March, the city government asked the courts to evict the unregistered Juma Mosque community and its unauthorized imam from its historic mosque in Baku's old city. On March 11, the Juma Mosque community filed for and received a postponement of its eviction pending an appeal. The Court of Appeals on April 22 upheld the Sabayil District Court decision to evict the community. Officials from the Ministry of Justice and police began the court-ordered eviction on the morning of June 30. The Law on Religious Freedom prohibits foreigners from proselytizing, which the Government strictly enforces. The law permits the production and dissemination of religious literature with the approval of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations; however, the authorities also appeared to selectively restrict individuals from importing and distributing religious materials. Articles critical of Wahhabism and Christian missionaries appeared in many newspapers in the country.

Belarus. Conditions of religious freedom continued to be poor during the reporting period. Following a 2002 law strongly restricting religious freedom and a 2003 agreement between the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) and the Government elevating the BOC's status, authorities continued to harass other religions and denominations. The new religion law requires all previously registered groups to reregister by November 2004 and banned immediately all religious activity by previously unregistered religious groups. The Government has repeatedly rejected the registration applications of some of these groups, including a number of Protestant denominations, the Belarusian Orthodox Autocephalous and some Eastern religions. Without registration, many of these groups find it difficult, if not impossible, to rent or purchase property to hold services. The government-run media continued to attack non-orthodox religions. All religious groups are required to receive prior governmental approval to import and distribute literature. Government subsidies are limited to the BOC, which is reportedly able to enjoy beneficial tax rates on land and property. The sale and distribution of anti-Semitic literature through state press distributors, government agencies, and at stores and events affiliated with the BOC continued. The National Academy of Science continued to sell anti-Semitic literature.

Brunei. Practitioners of non-Muslim faiths are not allowed 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 a range of municipal and planning laws and other legislation to restrict the expansion of all religions other than official Islam. The Government restricts the practice of non-Muslim religions 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.

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 continued to experience discrimination in the areas of education, housing, and employment. Schools in Arab areas, including Arab parochial schools, receive significantly fewer resources than comparable Jewish schools. Building codes for places of worship were selectively enforced based on religion. Non-Jews were underrepresented in the student bodies and faculties of most universities. The law does not allow for civil marriages for its citizens and does not recognize Jewish marriages unless performed by Orthodox officials. Governmental and societal discrimination against Israeli-Arabs continued during the reporting period, due primarily to Palestinian terrorism and the Government's military actions in the Occupied Territories. The Government refused to grant residence visas to some 130 Catholic clergy assigned by the Vatican to fulfill religious obligations in Israel and the occupied territories; however, there was considerable improvement on this issue toward the end of the reporting period. According to church officials, this number represents a 60 percent increase over the previous year. The Israeli Government seized land belonging to several religious institutions to build its separation-barrier between East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The separation-barrier and its checkpoints also impede the movement of clergy between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries, and the movement of congregations between their homes and places of worship. The Palestinian Authority (PA) failed to halt several cases of seizures of Christian-owned land by criminal gangs, and there were credible reports that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with members of these gangs to illegally extort property from Christian landowners.

Malaysia. Sunni Islam is the official religion, and the practice of non-Sunni Islamic beliefs is restricted significantly. Non-Muslims are free to practice their religious beliefs with few restrictions. Proselytizing of Muslims by members of other religions is strictly prohibited. The Government discourages but does not ban the distribution in peninsular Malaysia of Malay-language translations of the Bible, Christian tapes, and other printed materials. The Government continues to monitor the activities of the Shi'a minority. 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, in order to be "rehabilitated" and returned to the "true path of Islam."

Moldova. A number of minority religious groups in the separatist region of Transnistria, an area not under the control of the central government, were denied registration and were subjected to official harassment. There were several acts of ant-Semitism in Transnistria including the desecration of a Jewish cemetery and the attempted burning of a synagogue. There is no state religion; however, the Moldovan Orthodox Church receives some special treatment from the government in Moldova proper.

Russia. The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, conditions deteriorated somewhat for some minority religious faiths. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism, as well as societal hostility, toward Catholics and newer, non-Orthodox religions. Instances of religiously motivated violence occur, although it often is difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Government officials have spoken out against anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Several aspects of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience provide a basis for actions that restrict religious freedom. These include the provisions allowing the Government to ban religious organizations and establishing procedures for their liquidation (dissolution as a legal entity), such as the banning and liquidation of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow in early 2004. Activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and religions new to the country. However, a large number of foreign missionaries operate in the country, many from Protestant denominations. Human rights groups and religious minority groups 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, Mormons, and others. A court recently ordered the closing of an

anti-Semitic newspaper, and some religious groups have benefited from property restitution. The federal security bureau, the Procurator, and other official agencies have conducted campaigns of harassment against Muslims, Catholics, some Protestant groups, and newer religious movements.

Turkey. A sharp debate continued over the country's definition of "secularism" and the proper role of religion in society. The Government imposes some restrictions on Muslim and other religious groups and on Muslim religious expression, such as religious dress, in government offices and state run institutions, including universities. Although Parliament has removed some of the legal obstacles for religious minorities, such as building and maintaining churches, some Protestant Christian groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Baha'is continued to face restrictions and occasional harassment, including detentions for alleged proselytizing or unauthorized meetings. The more radical Islamic groups continued to express anti-Jewish sentiments. Additionally, persons wishing to convert from Islam experienced social harassment and violence from relatives and neighbors. Some members of non-Muslim religious groups claim they have limited career opportunities in government or military service.

DENOUNCING CERTAIN RELIGIONS BY AFFILIATING THEM WITH DANGEROUS "CULTS" OR "SECTS"

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

Belgium. The Government continued to observe and monitor some groups that a parliamentary commission's unofficial report listed as having been investigated as possible "harmful sects." In July 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 denied visas to volunteer teachers of the Assemblies of God because they did not qualify under visa limitations on foreign teachers. Since late 2003, the Church of Scientology International has sought to establish a dialogue with the Government to address the Government's perceptions and concerns. Due to ongoing Belgian criminal investigations of some local Belgium Church of Scientology officials, the Government has not yet agreed to their request.

France. Since being established in November 2002, an inter-ministerial Government organization has observed and analyzed 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 remained in force, though its provisions for the dissolution of groups have never been applied. In 2002, the Council of Europe passed a resolution critical of the law and invited the Government to reconsider it. In March, the Government passed a law (to be implemented in September) that restricts the wearing of "conspicuous religious symbols"—including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps, and large crosses—in public schools. Implementing regulations finalized in May provide for the display of "discreet religious symbols" and grant considerable discretion to individual schools to interpret and implement the law. Some religious leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments voiced concerns about the law's potential to restrict religious freedom.

Germany. The Church of Scientology, which operates 18 churches and missions, remained under scrutiny by both federal and some state officials, who contend that its ideology is opposed to the democratic constitutional order. The Hamburg Office for the Protection of the Constitution published "The Intelligence Service of the Scientology Organization," which outlines its claim that Scientology has tried to infiltrate governments, offices and companies and that the Church spies on its opponents, defames them, and "destroys" them. Scientologists continued to report instances of societal discrimination.

PART II: SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PROMOTION 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.

Afghanistan. The Constitution, ratified in January, helps secure religious freedom and equal rights for women and minorities that had been severely restricted under

the Taliban regime. Article 7 commits the state to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international treaties and conventions to which the country is a party; these documents include robust protections for religious freedom. Since the ratification of the constitution in January, there have been few instances of religious intolerance. There have been no more reported blasphemy cases or attacks on mullahs or mosques. The Government also encouraged Sikhs, Hindus, and other minorities to return, and there was a small but steady flow of returnees during the year. A curriculum and textbooks that emphasize general Islamic terms and principles steadily replaced the preaching of extremist views in schools. All Kabul schools and the surrounding provinces were using the new texts, which covered just under half of all provinces.

Georgia. The President, the National Security Council Secretary, and the Government Ombudsman have been effective advocates for religious freedom and have made numerous public speeches and appearances in support of minority religious groups. The Human Rights unit in the Legal Department of the Procuracy is charged with protecting human rights, including religious freedom. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and the Procuracy in certain instances have become more active in the protection of religious freedom. After the transfer of power in November 2003, they pursued criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their continued attacks against religious minorities. In March, the new government arrested the defrocked Orthodox priest, Basili Mkalavishvili, the leader of a violent movement of Orthodox believers who was responsible for hundreds of violent attacks against religious minorities. The USG and others in the international community had long urged this arrest, which has led to a noticeable improvement in lessening the harassment of minority Protestant believers.

India. The status of religious freedom improved in a number of ways during the period covered by this report, yet problems remained in some areas. By the end of its administration, the coalition led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had adopted a more inclusive rhetoric regarding minorities and took some steps to decrease violence. In late May, a new coalition came to power that pledged to respect the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance and to pay particular attention to the rights of religious minorities. Both new Prime Minister Singh and President Abdul Kalam have spoken out strongly against the riots in Gujarat state in 2002 that left at least 1,000 Muslims dead, and they have highlighted the need to provide equal justice and opportunities for religious minorities. The GOI has already taken some positive steps. Shortly after the elections, the state of Tamil Nadu announced the repeal of its anti-conversion law. There also has been some progress on conflict resolution in Gujarat. In April, the Supreme Court ordered the re-trial of the Best Bakery case, in which Hindu extremists killed 14 Muslims when the bakery was attacked by a large mob. As a way of ensuring the fairness of the process, the court ordered the trial to be moved from Gujarat to the jurisdiction of Mumbai. More recently, it ruled that the Gujarat government must re-open nearly 2000 cases stemming from the 2002 violence. In May, shortly after the elections, federal security forces were sent across the state to protect Muslim riot survivors and key witnesses in riot cases.

Turkey. In June 2003, Parliament approved an amendment to the Act on Construction, replacing the word "mosques" with "houses of worship," which in theory removes a legal obstacle to the establishment of non-Muslim religious facilities. In December 2003, the Interior Ministry issued a circular summarizing the legal amendments and directing provincial governors to "facilitate" efforts by religious communities to open places of worship. In January, the Government abolished the Minorities Subcommittee, established by secret regulation in 1962 to monitor minorities as potential threats to the country, and replaced it with the Board to Assess Problems of Minorities. According to the Government, the Board will work to support the rights of non-Muslims. In March, authorities approved an application by a group of German-speaking Christians to establish a religious/charity association in Alanya, Antalya Province. In the past, authorities have routinely rejected such applications on the grounds that the Act on Associations prohibits associations based on religion. Members of the Christian community reported that the Government revised school textbooks in response to complaints about inaccurate, negative references to Christianity. They said the revised versions represent a significant improvement.

Turkmenistan. While serious violations of religious freedom continued in Turkmenistan, the Government made progress in some areas. Government respect for religious freedom, both from a legislative perspective and in practice, improved during the period covered by this report. However, the Government continued to

monitor all forms of religious expression. All groups must register in order to gain legal status with the Government. Until recently, the only religions that were registered successfully were Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity, which are controlled by the Government; by the end of the reporting period, four minority religious groups had been registered. The March amendments to the law on religious organizations and subsequent Presidential decrees have enabled the Ministry of Justice to facilitate registration of some religious congregations and have engendered a noticeable reduction in harassment of minority congregations. The Government also repealed some criminal penalties for unauthorized religious activity. The President amnestied six members of Jehovah's Witnesses serving prison sentences for conscientious objection to military service.

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. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom urged senior Azeri officials to respect the religious freedom of the Juma Mosque Community and its imam and pressed for the return of the mosque to its community. The Embassy closely monitored the court case against the Juma Mosque Community and its imam, and met with government and religious leaders to urge them to uphold international religious freedom standards. The Ambassador conveyed U.S. concerns about the religious registration process to the Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations and expressed strong concerns about the Government's commitment to religious freedom both privately and publicly. The Embassy also repeatedly expressed objections to the censorship of religious literature. 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.

Belarus. U.S. Embassy staff maintained regular contact with representatives of religious groups, the Civil Initiative for Religious Freedom, and government officials responsible for religious affairs, and they met with resident and visiting American citizens of various religious faiths to discuss religious freedom issues. The Embassy closely monitored the continued sale of anti-Semitic and xenophobic literature at shops and events linked with the Belarusian Orthodox Church and state media distributors. Embassy staff, including the Ambassador, attended several events hosted by various religious groups. The Embassy regularly discussed religious issues with representatives of foreign diplomatic missions in Belarus. The Embassy continued to host roundtables of religious leaders to discuss issues pertaining to religious freedom and government harassment.

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. 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. Embassy Staff offered support to local nongovernmental organizations and religious leaders and acted as a conduit for exchanging information with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders.

China. The Secretary of State again designated China as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. 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. U.S. officials protested vigorously when there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. At the same time, U.S. officials made the case to the country's leaders that freedom of religion strengthens, rather than harms, the country. In December 2003, President Bush met with Premier Wen Jiabao in Washington and called for greater religious tolerance. The Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor traveled to China to discuss human rights and religious freedom issues with the Chinese Government. Staff members of the Office for International Religious Freedom also traveled to China to investigate religious freedom conditions, and to press for the release of religious prisoners and improvements in religious freedom policies.

Egypt. The U.S. President, the Secretary of State, the Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs, the U.S. Ambassador and Embassy officials have raised religious freedom concerns in bilateral dialogue with Egyptian leaders. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed religious freedom violations with senior Egyptian officials. Officials from the Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to Egypt and met with minister-level and other governmental officials, religious leaders and NGOs. The Embassy maintained an active dialogue with the leaders of the Christian and Muslim religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. The Embassy investigated complaints of official religious discrimination brought to its attention. An interagency small-grants program managed by the U.S. Embassy supports projects that promote tolerance and mutual respect between members of different religious communities.

Eritrea. 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. The U.S. Ambassador and the other Embassy officers have raised the cases of detentions and restrictions on sanctioned religious groups with government officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the leaders of the sole legal party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom pressed senior Eritrean officials to release religious prisoners, and permit closed churches to re-open. Senior staff from the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to Eritrea and met with senior government officials to urge the release of religious prisoners and the reopening of closed churches. The U.S. Embassy meets regularly with leaders of the religious community.

France. Representatives from the U.S. Embassy have met regularly with government officials, a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved with religious freedom issues. In June, senior U.S. Government representatives from Congress and the Departments of State and Justice worked closely with the French to ensure a successful conference in Paris to study the link between racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic Internet sites and hate crimes.

Georgia. The U.S. Government repeatedly raised its concerns regarding harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with the country's 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. The Ambassador attended the opening of a Pentecostal Assemblies of God Mission building in Tbilisi. At the urging of the USG and the international community, the new government arrested defrocked Orthodox priest Basili Mkalavalishvili in March, bringing to an end his violent leadership against minority religious groups and bringing about a noticeable lessening of harassment and violence against minority religious believers. In April, the Ambassador hosted an inter-faith reception for the visiting Orthodox Archbishop of Washington that was attended by Georgian Government officials, NGOs and representatives from a wide range of religious communities.

India. U.S. officials have continued to discuss with state officials the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion laws. U.S. officials have also urged that perpetrators of the Gujarat violence in 2002 be brought to justice. U.S. Embassy and Consulate officials met with important leaders of all of the significant minority communities. The Calcutta Principal Officer met church leaders in Orissa, including the President of the All India Christian Council, to discuss reports of ongoing harassment of converts and missionaries. The U.S. Consulate in Calcutta continued to conduct Iftar and Madrassa exchange programs. Embassy officials also continued an active program of outreach and engagement with leaders of the country's Muslim communities. The Consulate in Chennai organized a roundtable to promote better understanding among Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist communities. The Chennai Consulate also continued to reach out to the Muslim community through Iftar dinners and the International Visitor/Madrassa programs.

Indonesia. President Bush met with a number of key religious figures in October 2003 in Bali, underlining U.S. respect for religious freedom as a fundamental right. The U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, the Consulate General in Surabaya, 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. The U.S. Government took a number of steps to promote reli-

gious freedom, including hosting or sponsoring interfaith conferences and seminars; distributing information through radio, newspapers, and television; and arranging exchanges related to religious freedom.

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 Iran 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. In 2003 the U.S. supported a Canadian-sponsored resolution censuring Iranian human rights policies, which was passed by the UN General Assembly. The U.S. State Department spokesman on numerous occasions 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 those governments to raise the issue of religious freedom in discussions with the Government.

Israel. U.S. Embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, routinely met with religious officials to include Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Druze and Baha'i leaders at a variety of levels. The Embassy hosted an Iftar dinner to commemorate Ramadan, inviting over 80 Israeli Muslim representatives from the political, economic, legal, religious and business communities as well as representatives of interfaith organizations. The Ambassador met with former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey, Canon Andrew White of the International Center for Reconciliation, and U.S. Christian leaders. They discussed ways to implement commitments senior Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders had made in Egypt to reduce violence, to teach tolerance in religious educational settings, and to promote interfaith dialogue in support of the peace process. The Embassy held a meeting with the director of the Arab Association for Human Rights to discuss issues of concern to the Israeli-Arab community, including societal tensions between Arabs and Jews. The Embassy also provided grants to organizations examining the role of religion in resolving conflict.

Laos. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom traveled to Laos and discussed religious freedom concerns with senior Lao officials. He also visited areas of Vientiane Province where instances of intolerance toward Christian minorities had occurred. The U.S. Ambassador regularly urged the Government to improve its respect for religious freedom. He directly contacted provincial governors and senior central government officials concerning violations of religious freedom, which in many instances led to immediate corrective action. The Ambassador visited several areas that experienced religious intolerance, including Bolikhamsai, Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Xieng Khouang provinces and raised concerns with officials in those areas. The Deputy Chief of Mission also traveled to Attapeu, Champassak, and Savannakhet provinces to discuss religious freedom issues with provincial officials and assess the situation in those areas. The Embassy maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Department of Religious Affairs. As part of this dialogue, the Embassy informed the Government of specific cases of arrest or harassment, and the Government used this information to intercede with local officials.

Malaysia. U.S. 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. These included a seminar on human rights with Islamic values and a conference on religious diversity in America and Asia that focused on the role of religions and the shared challenges faced in multi-religious societies. The U.S. also funded a seminar featuring an Islamic perspective on the challenges to women in the 21st century, in which both conservative and liberal Muslims presented papers on the impact of Shari'a law on justice for women. This seminar attracted over 200 participants.

Nigeria. The U.S. Mission sought to encourage a peaceful resolution of the question of 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 worked to promote religious reconciliation between Christians and Muslims. The Mission hosted Iftars in both Abuja and Lagos in which both Christians and Muslims participated. The U.S. Mission also hosted an Iftar in Kaduna, the scene of Muslim-Christian riots in recent years, and publicly urged more than 20 Muslim and Christian leaders there to take a united stand against religious violence.

North Korea. The Secretary of State again designated the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the DPRK. The United States 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 U.S. Government provided the National Endowment for Democracy with $250,000 in 2002–03 for sub-grants to two South Korean NGOs to support monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions in the country. 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. 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. Embassy officers closely monitored the status of religious freedom and raised concerns about reported violations with Pakistani officials. The Embassy also assisted local and international human rights organizations to follow up on specific cases involving religious minorities. The Embassy sponsored several academics to travel to the United States with the International Visitors Program and participate in programs that focus on religious freedom and pluralism.

Russia. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the Consulate Generals in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok were active throughout the period in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom. The Ambassador and other senior US officials discussed religious freedom concerns with Russian leaders.

Saudi Arabia. In September 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. The U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and senior staff visited Saudi Arabia to meet with senior government officials and press for improvements in religious freedom. The U.S. Ambassador regularly discussed religious freedom concerns with a wide range of senior Government and religious leaders. The Ambassador also raised specific cases of violations with senior officials, and senior U.S. 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 state-sanctioned Wahhabi tradition of Islam. In addition, Embassy officers met with MFA officials at various other times during the year on matters pertaining to religious freedom.

Sudan. The Secretary of State again designated Sudan as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Embassy officers consistently raised religious freedom issues at all levels of government, and the Embassy has made it clear to the Government that progress on religious freedom issues is vital to improving its relationship with the United States. U.S. officials urged the issuance of building permits to allow the building of churches, allowing free movement and entry visas for visiting religious teachers and clerics, and not prohibiting printing of religious materials. In March, the Director of the Office of International Religious Freedom met with government and religious leaders in Khartoum to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country. The United States has continued to have a leading role in maintaining pressure on the Government to stop the violence in Darfur and to permit access for international humanitarian assistance. The Charge met on a regular basis with leaders from all the many Muslim sects and Christian denominations in Khartoum and on trips outside the capital, noting the importance of religious tolerance and the extent of U.S. interest and concern.

Turkey. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed religious freedom for Muslims and religious minorities in Turkey with the head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in Washington. In March, an official from the Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to Turkey to meet with Diyanet officials and representatives of Muslim and Christian communities. In June, President Bush met with President Sezer and discussed the importance of maintaining the tradition of religious freedom. The Ambassador also held an Iftar dinner with Government officials and others. Diplomats from the Embassy and Consulates attended Iftar dinners and met regularly with representatives of the various religious groups. Representatives from the Embassy and Consulate Adana attended trials involving religious issues.

Turkmenistan. The U.S. Ambassador and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom conveyed formal messages in April and May urging the Government to make a number of improvements with respect to religious freedom. Embassy representatives and State Department officials raised specific cases of religious freedom abuses in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. The Ambassador, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, and the U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe all urged senior Government officials to cease minority religious group harassment, to rescind onerous requirements for registration of religious groups, to decriminalize non-registered group activity and to permit minority groups to register. In addition, Embassy officers met with representatives of unregistered religious groups on a regular basis; these representatives have been more willing to meet publicly with Embassy officials following the improvements in religious freedom.

Uzbekistan. Senior U.S. officials regularly pressed the Government to release religious prisoners, to end religious freedom violations, and to improve legal protections for religious groups. The U.S. Embassy is actively engaged in monitoring religious freedom and maintains contact with government and religious leaders and human rights activists. When the U.S. Embassy received information concerning difficulties faced by religious groups, it intervened on their behalf, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Greater Grace Church in Samarkand, the Hushhabbar Church in Guliston, a Catholic Church in Urgench, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent and Fergana, a Pentecostal church in Andijan, an international non-denominational church in Tashkent, and several faith-based foreign aid organizations. Embassy officials met with numerous Muslim clergymen and pressed the Government to take action against security forces implicated in the torture of individuals arrested on suspicion of Islamic extremism. The Embassy also sponsors exchange and educational programs specifically designed to promote religious tolerance and to expand religious freedom.

Vietnam. 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. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom visited Vietnam to press for greater religious freedom in meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister, Deputy Foreign Minister, Deputy Minister of Public Security, the head of the Office of Religious Affairs, the Chairman of the Fatherland Front, and other government officials. Staff from the Office of International Religious Freedom also traveled to Vietnam three times. U.S. officials consistently urged the release of religious prisoners, a ban on forced renunciations of faith, an end to physical abuse of religious believers, and the reopening of hundreds of churches closed in the Central Highlands. Embassy and Consulate General officials also regularly raised religious freedom concerns with Vietnamese leaders. The Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs raised concerns about religious freedom during the annual bilateral political dialogue held in Hanoi in May. Embassy and Consulate staff also regularly met with religious leaders and traveled throughout the country to investigate reports of religious freedom violations.

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 14.3 million. Christianity is the religion of the vast majority of the country's population, with Roman Catholicism as the country's largest single denomination. The Roman Catholic Church claims 5 million adherents, but such figures could not be verified. The major Protestant denominations also are present, along with a number of Brazilian Christian and indigenous African denominations. The largest Protestant denominations, which include Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God, claim to have 3 million to 5 million adherents. The largest syncretic religious group is the Kimbanguist Church, whose followers believe that a mid-20th century Congolese pastor named Joseph Kimbangu was a prophet. A small portion of the country's rural population practices animism or traditional indigenous religions. There is a small Islamic community, less than 1 percent of the population, comprising mainly migrants from West Africa. There are few declared atheists in the country.

Following independence in 1975, the Government imposed restrictions on foreign-based missionaries, expelling many. However, since 1992, foreign-based missionaries have been able to return to the country and, following the April 2002 cease-fire ending the civil war, have returned to the interior of the country as the security situation has improved.

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. The Government has shut down several unregistered religious groups. In March the National Assembly unanimously approved a law establishing stricter criteria for the registration of religious groups. The law sets benchmarks for the number of adherents and congregations in the country needed to qualify for legal status. The Government passed the law as a protection against unregulated organizations posing as religious institutions. Major religious organizations supported the legislation. The Ministries of Justice and Culture currently recognize 83 denominations. There are reportedly over 800 other religious organizations, many of which are Congolese- or Brazilian-based Christian evangelical organizations that have not yet had action taken on their registration applications. Colonial-era statutes banned all non-Christian religious groups from the country; while those statutes have not been repealed,

they no longer are enforced. In early 2002, the colonial-era law granting civil registration authority to the religious groups was reinstated.

The Government permits religious organizations and missions to establish and operate schools.

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.

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.

Members of the clergy regularly use their pulpits to criticize government policies. In February 2003, government officials sharply criticized Catholic Church-owned Radio Ecclesia's call-in shows in which participants criticized the Government. However, Radio Ecclesia continued to host the call-in shows during the period covered by this report. In May President dos Santos said publicly that Radio Ecclesia could operate nationwide. Radio Ecclesia's operators began taking steps to begin nationwide broadcasting by August.

During the period covered by this report, 17 religious groups remained banned in Cabinda on charges of practicing medicine on the groups' members, of illegally holding religious services in residences, and of not being registered. In October 2003, five ministers in Cabinda were sentenced to 35 days in jail for disobeying local authorities' orders to stop holding services in private residences and places of business.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There have been reports in some poor, rural areas and secondary cities of children being accused of witchcraft. In the worst instances, these accusations have led to neglect, abuse, injury, or death.

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 the peace and reconciliation movement. Groups involved include the ecumenical Inter-Church Committee for Peace in Angola and the Catholic Pro-Peace movement.

Clergy members support new legal requirements to address the growing number of unregistered religious groups in rural provinces. There also was continuing hostility against traditional religions that involve shamans.

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 and are consulted regularly by Embassy officials. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, the Country Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development, and others, maintain an ongoing dialogue with the leadership of the country's religious denominations. The U.S. Government provides financial support to Radio Ecclesia to increase its public affairs and news programming as an independent alternative source of information to citizens. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy began funding 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 a total land area of 43,483 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.4 million. Reliable statistics on religious affiliation are not available; however, according to most estimates, approximately 30 percent of the population nominally is Christian, and approximately 20 percent nominally is Muslim. The remaining 50 percent of the population adheres to one form or another of traditional indigenous religions. Many persons who nominally identify themselves as Christian or Muslim also practice traditional indigenous religions. Among the most commonly practiced traditional indigenous religions is the animist ″Vodun″ system of belief, also commonly known as voodoo, which originated in this area of Africa. Almost all citizens appear to be believers of a supernatural order. There are virtually no atheists.

More than half of all Christians are Roman Catholics. Other groups include members of the Baptist, Methodist, Assembly of God, Pentecostal, the Church of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Celestial Christians, Rosicrucian, the Unification Church, Eckankar, Seventh-day Adventists and the Baha'i Faith. 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 traditional 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 faiths.

Missionary groups operate freely throughout the country. Foreign missionary groups presently known to be operating in the country include the Watchtower Society, Mormons, Assemblies of God, Mennonites, Church of the Nazarene, Adventists, Society in Mission, 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 February 2003, the Constitutional Court upheld a Defense Ministry decision allowing its gendarmes to intervene in conflicts between religious groups only as a neutral peacekeeping force. Any intervention was required 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 October 2003, the Constitutional Court ruled that simple discussions on religion, even when they turn into mockeries, cannot be analyzed as a violation 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.

The Constitution provides for a secular state; consequently, public schools are not authorized to provide religious instruction.

National holidays include Christian, Islamic, and traditional religious commemorations. One indigenous, three Muslim, and six Christian religious holidays are officially observed: Ramadan, Tabaski, Maouloud, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Assumption Day, All Saints Day, Christmas, and 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 geographic regions.Interfaith dialogue occurred regularly, and citizens respected different religious traditions and practices, including syncretistic beliefs. Many Vodun followers are also Christian and Muslim; therefore they are tolerant of other religions.

Ecumenical Day has been celebrated on the first Wednesday of May for the past 36 years, and traditionally it includes a large celebration of inter-religious cooperation in the historic town of Ouidah. Individual religious leaders attempt 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 interfaith 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 a total area of 224,710 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.8 million. An estimated one-half 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 ma-

jority of Christians. There are also congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and other Christian denominations. Most other citizens adhere to traditional indigenous religions or to a mixture of religions. 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. There is a small Muslim community; approximately 23,000, it is a little more than 1 percent of the total population, primarily of South Asian origin. There is a Hindu population of roughly the same size and ethnic composition, and a very small Baha'i community.

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 the local banks. Unregistered groups potentially are liable to penalties including fines up to $100 (500 pula), up to 3 years in jail, or both. In 2003 28 new churches were registered. One church was deregistered in 2003 for failing to provide the registrar with annual returns, meeting minutes, membership lists, or audited accounts.

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 taking 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 holidays 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.″

As a result of a confirmed case of polio in the Ngami District in the northern region, the Government ordered polio vaccinations targeting children under 5 years of age during the reporting period. Some members of the Apostle Church of God vowed on religious grounds not to allow health authorities to immunize their children. The Zezuru communities, originally Zimbabwean immigrants, also resisted the vaccinations. In response to this resistance, the High Court gave police the authority to ″access any house, vehicle, school or property where it is suspected any children within the specified age group are hidden for purposes of evading or frustrating the National Polio Immunization Campaign.″ Any parent or guardian refusing to allow health personnel to immunize a child would be guilty of an offense against the Public Health Regulations, which carries the penalty of a 3-month jail sentence, or a fine of $100 (500 pula), or both. Police have arrested several parents and guardians, most around the central town of Serowe, parts of Gaborone, and Francistown in the northeast. In Serowe 11 members were arrested, fined, and sentenced to 3 months in jail for refusing to have their children vaccinated; however, the members did not serve their sentence, but were paroled. Local authorities, such

as village heads and traditional chiefs, have overcome the resistance by persuading communities to become vaccinated.

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. 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 outreach 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 in the effort to stop HIV/AIDS.

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 a total area of 105,689 square miles, and its population is approximately 12.2 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 15 to 20 percent practices Roman Catholicism, approximately 5 percent is member of various Protestant denominations, and 20 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 Wahhabite branches.

Muslims are concentrated largely around the northern, eastern, and western borders, while Christians are concentrated in the center of the country. Traditional indigenous 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. The country has 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 entail 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, Mouloud, 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 never has denied a publishing or broadcasting license to any religious group that has requested one. The procedures for applying for publishing and broadcasting licenses are the same for both religious groups and commercial entities. Applications first are 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.

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 (CNLPE) reported that some persons in the country are performing female genital mutilation on younger girls to evade 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 groups of Muslims due to leadership disputes. In November 2003, local authorities in the southern city of Po temporarily closed three city mosques because of leadership conflicts within the Muslim community. The mosques were reopened after a 2-week closure. Unlike in the past, there were no reports of violent clashes within sectors of the Muslim community 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. The U.S. Embassy sponsored a number of workshops and discussions exploring different religions and the importance of tolerance. The Embassy also sent three participants on an International Visitor Program about Islam in a democracy, and participants reported that the visit positively influenced their attitudes. The Embassy also maintains contacts with leaders of all major organized religious denominations and groups in the country.

BURUNDI

The Transitional Constitutional Act, promulgated in October 2001, 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 a total area of 10,747 square miles and its population is approximately 6.5 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, a majority of whom live in urban areas. The remainder of the population belongs to other Christian churches, practices traditional indigenous religions, or has no religious affiliation. In recent years, there has been a proliferation 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 Transitional Constitutional Act, promulgated in October 2001, 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 new bill that specifically guarantees religious freedom and details the registration and regulation of religious organizations was drafted by the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for registering religious groups. The bill has been approved by the Council of Ministers and has been sent to the National Assembly for consideration.

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 of the religious institution or affiliation, a copy of its statutes, address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the religious institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative, all of whom must have completed secondary school and have no criminal records. 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 asked 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 a period of 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 religious holidays of the Catholic Church, including the Assumption, the Ascension, All Saint's Day, and Christmas. There are no official Muslim holidays; however, Muslims can take Islamic holidays off from both government and private sector jobs.

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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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

On December 29, 2003, Papal Nuncio Michael Courtney was killed by unknown assailants near Minago, Bujumbura Rural Province. The motive for the attack is unknown; however, there is no indication that the attack was motivated by the religious affiliation of the victim.

In August 2002, rebels from the Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD) in Kigihu, Rutana Province, reportedly killed parish priest Peter Tondo. The motive appears to have been robbery, and there is no indication that the killing was motivated by the religious affiliation of the victim. There were no new developments in this case by the end of 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups 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 of promoting human rights. Embassy officials also maintain regular contact with leaders and members of the various religious communities. In May, the U.S. Government funded a 3-week Catholic Relief Services' training of Burundian religious leaders in peace building and national reconciliation.

CAMEROON

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

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 discrimination within their regions, although this may reflect ethnic more than religious differences.

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 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. 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 overwhelmingly is Muslim. Other ethnic groups, known collectively as the Kirdi, generally practice some form of Islam. According to a church official in the Far North Province, there are reportedly 110,000 Catholic and 150,000 Protestant Kirdi practicing in Cameroon. 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 Catholic, Muslim, the Baha'i Faith, Baptist, Presbyterian, Evangelic Protestants, Methodist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unification Church, Seventh-day Adventists Church, New Church of God, and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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 a few exceptions. 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 does allow 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 April 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 affiliation for members of a particular ethnic or kinship group, or for 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 Koranic 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. In 2002 and 2003, Confessional Education officials from all denominations complained that they had not received their financial allocations from the Government. The Government explained that this was a budgetary problem. All of the groups received payments by the end of 2003.

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. A new private Catholic radio station, Radio Veritas, submitted its application to broadcast in January 2001. In December 2003, after several months of misunderstanding between the Government and the Archdiocese over the station's licensing application, the Ministry of Communication fi-

nally granted Radio Veritas a temporary authorization to broadcast. At the end of the period covered by this report, the station had been permitted to broadcast for several months without incident.

The state-sponsored television station, CRTV, carries 2 hours of Christian programming on Sunday mornings, normally 1 hour of Catholic Mass and 1 hour from a Protestant church. There is also 1 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.

Both 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 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.

In April 2002, the Government banned the Ma'alah, a nontraditional religious body, following the March 2002 death of a 6-year-old girl whose mother and other members of the religious group had beaten to death. The group believed that severe beating could extract the devil from a possessed body. Both the Government and the girl's father have since sued the mother and her accomplices. At the end of the period covered by this report, court action was still pending. Shortly after her arrest, the mother escaped and fled overseas. She remained at large at the end of the period covered by this report and her absence is likely to delay further court action.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In the past, the sites and personnel of religious institutions were not exempt from the widespread human rights abuses committed by government security forces; however, there were no reports of such abuses during the period covered by this report.

In December 2003, armed bandits killed Brother Anton Probst, a German missionary working in the Centre Province. He was the paymaster for his organization and is believed to have been carrying a large sum of money at the time of the attack. On January 7, the Judicial Police arrested Michel Atanga Effa and Gervais Balla as suspects in the killing. The two men remained in custody awaiting formal charges at the end of the period covered by this report.

In July 2002, the GSO, a special Yaounde police unit, arrested and charged 21-year-old Robert Ndoumbe Elimbi for the April 2001 murder of Appolinaire Ndi, a parish priest in the Yaounde diocese. Elimbi remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report and no trial date had been set.

According to press reports, in April 2002, the Muslim authorities of Bui Division in the Northwest province tortured six members of the Dariga Tijaniya, a schismatic Islamic group. According to the Bui authorities, during certain worship rituals, male members of the religious group were having sex with female members in mosques, where sexual activity is unlawful. The Bui authorities further alleged that the six members had killed several persons in Nigeria and continued to cause serious turmoil in Foumban, a Muslim Sultanate in the West Province. The 6 members, who were released, denied all charges and stated that the Bui Muslim authorities had fined them 24 cows. The Bui authorities denied the fine allegation. Central government authorities did not involve themselves in the case.

Unlike in previous years, imams of the Muslim Sultanate of Foumban did not disturb the public order or sabotage any Ramadan ceremonies.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion by the Government. In addition, the Government responded promptly to assist the Embassy in the one reported case of forced conversion of American citizens by a private actor. In January, the Embassy Consular section assisted an American citizen in securing physical custody over her two American citizen children. The children were being held by their Cameroonian-born father on a family compound and were forced to worship a family elder and to perform invasive purification rituals. Following the Embassy's intervention (which utilized Cameroonian law enforcement assistance), the mother and children were repatriated to the U.S. The religious leader of the group is currently in police custody pending formal charges.

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 persons who practice traditional indigenous religions is strong and widespread. In addition, some Christians in rural areas of the north complained of discrimination by Muslims.

In May 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 to encourage their congregations to respect religious diversity and promote religious tolerance.

In November 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.

There were two reported incidents of religious violence during the period covered by this report. In late 2003, a Christian convert from a predominantly Muslim area of the West Province came to the Embassy to complain that he had been harassed, beaten and jailed by a traditional ruler in an effort to convince him to convert back to Islam. There was no evidence that local authorities were aware of or took any action in this case.

In May 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 time of this report, no legal action had been brought in this case.

These two incidents of violence appear to have been religiously motivated; however, this type of discrimination may reflect a combination of ethnic and religious differences.

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 descendents 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. It is reported that some religious leaders warn congregations during major celebrations to beware of such 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 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 Iftaar dinner during the holy month of 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 in Cameroon and consular repatriation services to American citizens in a case of forced religious conversion.

Embassy officials met on several occasions with Douala Archbishop Cardinal Christian 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-Mokolo in the predominantly Muslim and animist Far North Province, and regularly with various missionary groups active throughout the country to discuss religious freedom and human rights. In addition, during their regular trips within Cameroon's 10 provinces, Embassy officials frequently meet local religious officials to discuss their work and any problems they may be experiencing 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, which consists of 9 inhabited islands, has a total area of 1,557 square miles, and its population is approximately 458,000 according to the country's National Statistics Institute. The overwhelming majority, 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 churches 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.

There is no association between religious differences and ethnic or political affiliations; however, it generally is understood that 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 MPD's performance.

There are some 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.

Violation of religious freedom is a crime subject to a penalty of between 2 and 8 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.

It generally is recognized that 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 country's 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 an association. Failure to register has not previously 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 terrorists 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 1999 four Adventists were accused of desecration of a Catholic Church on Boa Vista Island. The case initially was tried and dismissed in the lower court; however, on the Government's appeal, the Supreme Court ruled that the case should be retried on the grounds that pertinent evidence was not considered in the first trial. The case was retried by the lower court and was once again dismissed. Pursuant to a second appeal, the case was referred to the Supreme Court where it is currently awaiting a decision.

The 2001 trial of four individuals of the "Sao Domingos Group," who were accused of desecrating a Catholic Church in 1996, is still pending. There have been no new reports of desecration since 2000.

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's dialogue with the Government 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

Until it was suspended following the events of March 15, 2003, the Constitution provided for freedom of religion, although it prohibited what the former Government considered religious fundamentalism or intolerance; at times the Government limited this right in practice. 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.

Although in general there is religious tolerance among members of different religious groups, there were several reported mob killings of persons suspected of practicing witchcraft during the period covered by this report. There also were occasional reports that villagers believed to be witches were harassed or beaten.

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 approximately 242,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.7 million of which an estimated 690,000 live in the capital, Bangui. Approximately 50 percent of the population is Christian, approximately 15 percent is Muslim, and approximately 35 percent practice 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, such as the Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Grace Brethren, and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as missionaries from Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and other African countries. However, during November and December 2002, many missionaries left the country as a result of fighting between government forces and rebels led by General Bozize, particularly in western areas of the country. In the period covered by this report, some of the displaced missionaries returned to the country and resumed their activities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Until it was suspended following the events of March 15, 2003, the Constitution provided for freedom of religion, although it prohibited what the former Government considered religious fundamentalism or intolerance; at times the Government limited this right in practice. 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 is no state religion. There is no indication that the Government favors any particular religion; however, during the period covered by this report, at least one minority religion complained that the Government granted free time each week on the official radio station to Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim speakers but required the representatives of smaller religions to 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 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 holidays 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 holidays; however, Muslims are allowed to take holidays off from work.

In the past, the Government has taken positive steps to promote interfaith dialogue, including organizing interfaith masses to promote peace.

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. However, 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 understood widely 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

On September 26, 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 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.

During November and December 2002, many missionaries left the country as a result of fighting between government forces and rebels linked to an initial October 2002 coup attempt led by General Bozize. Missionaries working near the area of the insurrections in the western part of the country were reportedly attacked and their stations experienced severe looting. In December 2002, Father Jean Claude Kilamong was found dead in Bossangoa; the priest reportedly was taken hostage by rebels linked to an October 2002 coup attempt led by General Bozize. There have been no arrests made in regard to the case surrounding Father Kilamong's death. Two weeks prior to the priest's death, a Franciscan community near Bossangoa was reportedly attacked by the same rebels; three missionaries were beaten and threatened with death before fleeing to Bangui.

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. There were several reported mob killings of persons suspected of practicing witchcraft in recent years. No action was taken in the case where angry mob killed two elderly women suspected of practicing witchcraft in 2001 by the end of the period covered by this report.

In recent years, bandits have attacked missionaries on several occasions. 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. Unlike in recent years, there were no large-scale ecumenical services.

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. Although U.S. Embassy operations in Bangui are currently suspended, the Embassy's local staff maintains contact with religious groups, especially U.S. missionaries in the country, and monitors

human rights developments as possible, under the direction of the Department of State. [1]

CHAD

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

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

Although the different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, there were reports of occasional tension between Christians and Muslims in reaction to proselytizing by evangelical 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 a total 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 adherents to 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; thus the Muslim representative is expected to transfer responsibilities to a designate of 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 for a number of religious groups in certain situations. The Constitution also provides that the country shall be a secular state; however, despite the secular nature of the state, a disproportionately large portion of senior government officials are Muslims, and some policies favor Islam in practice. For example, the government sponsors annual Hajj trips to Mecca for certain government 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 it 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 they must register and receive authorization from the Ministry of Interior, as do other foreigners traveling in the country. There were no reports that authorization was withheld from any group. Muslim, Catholic and Protestant missionaries proselytize in the country.

[1] The U.S. Embassy in Bangui temporarily suspended operations on November 2, 2002, in response to security concerns raised by the military coup. Political relations with the government in Bangui are currently handled by the Department of State.

The Government celebrates both Christian and Muslim holidays as national holidays. Muslim national holidays include: Aid-Al-Adha (February), Maouloud-Al-Nebi (May), and Aid-Al-Fitr (November). Christian holidays include: Easter Monday (April), All Saint's 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

In July 2002, the Minister of Territorial Administration formally admonished the Catholic Church to stay out of all political activities. The Minister was reacting specifically to a "train the trainers" program that the Catholic Church conducted for election observers in advance of the municipal elections scheduled for late 2002 (a representative from the Ministry attended both the opening and the closing of the workshop, at the Church's invitation). According to the Minister, the Catholic Church was trying to become a political party or a civil society organization, which would illegally combine religion and politics. However, during the 2001 presidential elections, the head of the Superior Council of Islamic Affairs advocated on behalf of a Muslim candidate without a similar rebuke from the Government.

The Islamic religious group Faid 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 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 Faid al-Djaria's religious customs that 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.

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. Government lands reportedly were accorded to Islamic leaders for the purpose of building mosques, while other religious denominations must purchase land at market rates to build places of worship.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In February 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 recently built the structure following a conflict with Abeche's Islamic Affairs Committee that dated back several years. There was no further information at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government has imprisoned and sanctioned fundamentalist Islamic imams believed to be promoting conflict among Muslims. In July 2002, the Superior Council of Islamic Affairs rebuked Mahamadou Mahamat (also known as Sheikh Faki Suzuki) and Haroun Idriss Abou-Mandela after the imams participated in a weekly program on religion aired by the private radio station FM Alnassr. According to the Grand Imam, who heads the council, only those authorized by the council can speak in the name of Islam on the radio. Both had been previously banned from preaching by the council.

Imam Sheikh Mahamat Marouf, a fundamentalist Islamic leader from Abeche who the Government arbitrarily arrested and detained in 1999 for 1 year, continued to be prohibited from leading prayers. His followers were allowed to pray in their mosques, but the Government continued forbid them from debating religious beliefs in any way that might be considered proselytizing or a threat to public order.

Several human rights organization reported on the problem of the "mahadjir" children. 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.

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 the different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, there were reports of occasional tension between Christians and Muslims in reaction to proselytizing by evangelical Christians.

In the past, former Islamic adherents who have converted to Christianity as well to other religions were shunned by their families and sometimes have been beaten; however, there were no reported incidents of beatings during the period covered by this report.

Most interfaith dialogue happens on an organizational level and not through the intervention of the Government.

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 widely distributed electronic journals on freedom of religion.

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 the United States to key Muslim leaders and to local schools. The Embassy also expanded English language learning opportunities to a Muslim university and a local mosque. 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. Finally, 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.

COMOROS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, authorities continued to infringe on 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 of the population is Sunni Muslim; government authorities continued to prohibit Christians from proselytizing, and the local authorities and population restricted the right of Christians to practice their faith in parts of the country. In the past, police regularly threatened and sometimes detained practicing Christians; however, there were no reports of such incidents during the period covered by this report.

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 a total area of 838 square miles, and its population is approximately 635,000. An overwhelming majority—almost 99 percent—of the population is Sunni Muslim. There are fewer than 400 Christian citizens (less than 1 percent of the population). There are fewer than 200 foreigners who are Hindus, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, Catholics, and members of other Christian religious groups who live on the islands. There are no known atheists.

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, which was voted into effect in December 2001 and which reincorporates Anjouan, 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, the Government discouraged the practice of other religions. Government authorities continued to prohibit Christians from proselytizing, and the local authorities and population restricted the right of Christians to practice their faith in parts of the country.

The Grand Mufti is part of the Government and manages a department that handles issues concerning religion and 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. Since 2001 the Grand Mufti periodically has 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 for students at the middle level. There are no separate provisions made for religious minorities in public schools. There are at least two private schools on the island of Grand Comore that cost approximately $27 (15,000 Comorian francs) per month. Almost all children between the ages of 4 and 7 also attend Koranic schools to learn to recite and understand the Koran, although attendance is not compulsory for religious minorities.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government discouraged the practice of religions other than Islam. In particular Christians faced restrictions on their ability to practice their faith. There are two Roman Catholic churches, one in Moroni, on the island of Grande 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, foreigners are deported, while citizens found proselytizing are imprisoned.

Local authorities and religious leaders continued to harass Christians on Anjouan where suspicion of Christians appeared to be stronger. Unlike in the previous period covered by this report, there were no reports that community authorities on Anjouan banned Christians from attending any community events or prohibited Christian burials in a local cemetery.

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 the past, the Government arrested and convicted individuals with Christian affiliations on charges of "anti-Islamic activity," and police regularly threatened and sometimes detained practicing Christians; however, there were no reports of such incidents during the period covered by this report. Usually the authorities held those detained for a few days and often attempted to convert them forcibly to Islam.

In the past, there have been accounts of police and quasi-police authorities, known as embargoes, arresting, beating, and detaining Christians on the island of Anjouan. There were no reports of Christians being detained on Anjouan 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 is widespread societal discrimination against Christians in some sectors of life. In Grand Comore, there exist 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; however, Christians sometimes face insults and threats of violence from members of their communities. Societal pressure and intimidation continued to restrict the use of the country's three churches to noncitizens. In previous years, Christians have been harassed by mobs in front of mosques and questioned by religious authorities.

Although there were reports in past years that citizens who converted to Christianity had been ostracized by family and villages, there were no reports of unofficial campaigns against Christians or efforts to isolate them from village life during the period covered by the report. In some instances in previous years, some Christians were forced from their homes, threatened with the loss of financial support, or had their Bibles taken by family members; and local government officials, religious authorities, and family members attempted to force Christians to attend services at mosques against their will. This was particularly the case on Anjouan, although no such incidents were reported during the period covered by this report.

There is concern that Islamic fundamentalism is increasing as more students return to the country after studying in colleges and universities in more fundamentalist Islamic countries. There is some indication from government sources that this increase may be the result of attempts by young citizens returning from such Islamic theological studies abroad 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 state that one important goal of the University is to give young citizens the option of doing their university studies in the country instead of overseas where they might learn more radical ideas. Currently there are 1,900 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.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The transitional 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 in central government-controlled areas during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. In areas not under central government control, respect for religious freedom improved. Unlike the previous reporting period, there were no confirmed incidents of soldiers or militia members attacking religious leaders or churches.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there continued to be credible reports that a number of children and elderly persons were accused of witchcraft and abandoned 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 a total area of 905,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 58 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 practices 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 Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Evangelical, Mormon, and Jehovah's Witness.

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 RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 26 of the transitional constitution provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. 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 Non-profit 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 in 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 a forum for religious leaders to gather and discuss issues of concern. In addition, it advises the Government while presenting a common moral and religious front.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practiced 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 by security forces, such as freedom of movement imposed on all persons by security force members who erected and manned roadblocks, at which they often solicited bribes.

Bundu Dia Kongo, an ethnically based spiritual and political movement that called for the overthrow of the Government and the establishment of an "ethnically pure" kingdom from the Bakongo tribe remained outlawed. Unlike in the period covered by the previous report, there were no reports that members of Bundu Dia Kongo were arrested.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In areas not under central government control, respect for religious freedom improved. Unlike in the period covered by the previous report, there were no reported instances of individual attacks against priests, parishioners, churches, parish property, and schools. No individuals responsible for cases from previous reporting periods have been charged, tried, or convicted of wrongdoing.

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 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 prac-

ticing witchcraft and driven from their homes by their families. Witchcraft accusations generally occur due to financial difficulties, death, disease, unemployment, or the remarriage of a parent. Some of the accused children who are not abandoned are reportedly taken to special religious groups to undergo exorcisms. During the exorcisms, children may be locked in boxes for long periods of time, starved for several days, or receive other harsh treatments.

During the period covered by this report, there was a decrease in the number of incidents reported 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.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports of violence against priests or parishioners. However, 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. 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. Two examples of these projects include a grant to a Muslim human rights organization to train teachers to educate students about democracy and human rights and a grant to a Catholic organization to broadcast radio programs on elections, democracy, and human rights. Also, the Embassy conducted extensive outreach with members of the Muslim community and awarded 22 scholarships 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 1997–2001. In March 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 a total 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. Muslims make up 2-percent of the population; most are immigrants from North and West Africa who work in urban centers. 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 (especially 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 during 1998–99. While the association continues, its influence has diminished considerably since March 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

Title II, Article 8 of 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 involve fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation for foreigners, but no criminal penalties are applicable.

The Government recognizes the Christian holidays of Christmas, Easter Monday, and Pentecost Monday as national holidays. Muslim holidays are not nationally observed; however, they are respected.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There is a growing Muslim community in the country, mostly consisting of immigrants from West Africa and Lebanon. The West African immigrants mostly arrive from Mali, Benin, Togo, and Senegal.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In March 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.

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.

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 the issues with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidency, and members of the National Assembly. The U.S. Embassy also has implemented public diplomacy programs with key civil society groups that address these issues. Through Democracy and Human Rights funding, the Embassy supports four Congolese Human Rights organizations whose goals consist of strengthening recognition of religious diversity, including animism.

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 people of northern origins, many of whom were Muslims, 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. There was halting progress on LMA implementation during the period covered by this report.

The status of respect for religious freedom improved somewhat during the period covered by this report. Unlike during the crisis, there were no reports that security forces killed Muslim leaders. While the conflict exacerbated political and, at times, ethnic divisions, religion was not a significant factor in the crisis. The establishment of a Ministry of Religion in March 2003 highlighted the Government's efforts to deal with religious strains.

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 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 124,500 square miles, and its population is approximately 18 million. Religious groups in the country include Muslims, Christians, practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, and others. Churches include the Roman Catholic Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Assemblies of God, the Southern Baptist Church, the Autonomous Church of Celestial Christianity of Oschoffa, the Union of the Evangelical Church of Services and Works of Cote d'Ivoire, the Unification Church, the Harrist Church (an African Protestant denomination founded in the country in 1913 by a Liberian preacher named William Wade Harris), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Protestant Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire, the Coptic Church, the Pentecostal Church of Cote d'Ivoire, the Interdenominational Church, the Yoruba First Church, the Church of God International Missions, and the Baptist Church Missions. Other religions include Buddhism, the Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Dehima, the Church of the Prophet Papa Nouveau (a syncretistic religion founded in the country in 1937 that combines Christian doctrine, traditional indigenous rituals, and practical concern for social, political, and economic progress for Africans), the Messianic Church, Bossonism (the traditional religious practices of the Akan ethnic group), the Limmoudim of Rabbi Jesus (a small Christian group, the origins of which are unknown), the Eckankar religion (a syncretistic religion founded in 1965 in Nigeria that sees human passion as an obstacle to uniting a person's divine qualities), and the Movement of Raelis. Many religious groups in the country are associated with U.S. religious groups.

The most recent national census, conducted in 1998, indicated that for citizens and noncitizens, 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 practice 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 are 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 the sale of sacred objects imbued with supernatural powers to bring health and good luck. 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 towards conversion to Christianity and Islam. 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 country's North, West, Center, and East. 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. Since population growth and movement have accentuated ethnic distinctions between the groups of the Sahel and those of the forest zone, those distinctions sometimes have been expressed in terms of religion such as northern Muslims and southern Christians and traditionalists.

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, but some Nigerians and Congolese also established 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; however, the Government favored some religious groups. 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 both employment and the renewal of national identity cards.

In past years, the Government paid for the construction of Catholic cathedrals; however, the Government recently sponsored the construction of shrines for groups other than the Catholic Church. During the period covered by this report, the Government directed the construction of the Plateau Mosque in central Abidjan and financed it with the help of governments or government-affiliated religious organizations of some largely Islamic Arab countries. According to a Ministry of Religion official, there was no significant progress on the mosque construction during the reporting period because funds from Islamic donor countries decreased due to the instability in the country.

The Government recognizes all major Muslim religious holidays and five Christian holidays. The recognized Muslim holy days are the Eid Al-Fitr, Ei Al-Adha, Layla tul-Qadr, and Prophet Muhammad's birthday. The recognized Christian holy days are Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and All Saints Day.

The law requires religious groups to register with the Government. All religious groups wishing to operate in the country must submit to the Ministry of the Interior a file including the group's bylaws, the names of the founding members, the date of founding (or 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 Interior investigates the backgrounds of the founding members to ascertain that the group has no politically subversive purpose. Although nontraditional religious groups, such as public secular associations, are required to register with the Government, no penalties are imposed on a group that fails to register. In practice registration may bring advantages of public recognition, invitations to official ceremonies and events, publicity, gifts, and school subsidies. 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 offer religious instruction. While a 1966 government decree that allowed "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. The Government did not subsidize Muslim schools.

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, to attend official ceremonies and to sit on deliberative and advisory committees. However, the Government does not invite traditional indigenous religious groups to the ceremonies or committee meetings.

In November 2003, President Gbagbo met with a group of Muslims at the end of Ramadan. He told them he was sensitive to the concerns of the Muslim community, just as he was sensitive to the concerns of all religious groups in the country. President Gbagbo condemned the actions of those who "manipulate" religion to achieve their political goals.

In September 2003, the Ministry of Religion, in conjunction with the United Nations Population Fund, organized a workshop that sought to promote interfaith cooperation between various religious communities. No action was taken after the workshop.

In April 2003, the Government hosted an international colloquium for West African religions on "The Role of Religions in the Resolution of Regional Conflicts." The colloquium concluded that religion needs to be more a force for cohesion rather than division. The colloquium praised the local religious communities for putting aside their differences and working together for peace.

In March 2003, following the signing of the Marcoussis agreement, the Government created a Ministry of Religion to improve interfaith understanding. The Ministry sought to promote national reconciliation and to help prevent the national crisis from turning into an interethnic and interreligious conflict. The Government created the Ministry to emphasize the secular nature of the state because both Muslim and Christian groups believe the State disproportionately favors the other.

During the period covered by this report, some Muslim leaders claimed that many state institutions, particularly the national television and radio stations, were dominated by Christian programming, including broadcasts of the Catholic Mass, choirs, religious services, and Christian music. Specifically, the Islamic National Council (CNI) 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 television show.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government monitors minority religious groups for signs of political activity it considers subversive. In the early months of the 2002 crisis, there were credible reports that the Government expanded its surveillance of Islamic associations. There were significantly fewer reports of Government surveillance of religious groups during the period covered by this report.

In the past, the Government informally favored the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic Church leaders traditionally 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. President Gbagbo continues 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 are 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/non-citizen) and how the cards are to be distributed. As most 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 in order to vote or otherwise take advantage of citizenship. Some noncitizens, particularly from the North, accuse the government of delaying or not processing their naturalization

cases. Some people, particularly northerners and foreigners, complain that security forces have harassed them for having the wrong identity cards or not having an identity card. The Marcoussis agreement calls for the resolution of the national identity question and improved implementation of naturalization laws to ensure the granting of citizenship in an equitable manner to those qualified.

Most Muslims in the country are from northern African countries from which there has been substantial immigration into the country. Consequently, government officials and other citizens often treat Muslim citizens like foreigners. For example, northern citizens, who are mostly Muslim, 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 "work identity card" (carte de séjour), which is normally given to foreigners only. Also, 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.

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 December 2003, the Islamic 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 said the Government must be involved in the organization of Hajj as it involves 3,000–4,000 citizens leaving the country each year.

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 seemed disinclined to allow traditional indigenous religions the social status accorded to Christianity and Islam. For example, no traditional indigenous religious leader (except for traditional rulers, whose responsibilities as rulers required them to perform some traditional religious functions) received an invitation to present New Year's greetings to the President or to take part in a government advisory council. However, traditional Akan chiefs very often were invited to participate in traditional libation ceremonies aimed at recognizing ancestors at the beginning of important ceremonies.

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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In October 2003, Minister of Security Martin Bleou announced that the Government discovered a plot to kill Abidjan Cardinal Bernard Agre, but did not say who was involved. Bleou announced the opening of an investigation arrests or publicized findings. Rebel groups, now known collectively as the New Forces, released a statement denying that they had any intention to harm Agre.

In February an unknown gunman shot at five members of the executive committee of the Ivoirian High Council of Imams (COSIM) who were meeting on the terrace of the Riviera Mosque in Abidjan. Two days after the event, the Minister of Religion, Minister of Security, and President Gbagbo's religious advisor met the imams to express their concern. The imams alleged at a press conference that Government response was far slower than its reaction to the threat against Cardinal Agre. The Minister of Security opened an investigation into the attack; however, no results were released, and no arrests were made in connection with the attack by the end of the reporting period.

Following the 2002 rebellion, there were credible reports that Government military and security forces committed abuses, including reprisal killings, against presumed rebel sympathizers, which included many Muslims. In October 2002, government security forces reportedly killed more than 100 noncombatants, mostly Muslims, in Daloa who allegedly supported the advancing rebel forces. The Government denied that its forces were responsible for the 2002 Daloa killings. However, the international press and human rights organizations reported that security forces

were responsible for the killings in Daloa, citing multiple eyewitnesses. In October 2002, the Government announced an investigation into the killings, which so far has yielded no arrests or other results.

During the early days of the 2002 crisis, government forces, along with unknown assailants, reportedly killed several Muslim leaders. There have been no arrests for the January and February 2003 killings of Mamadou Ganame, a Koranic instructor in Bianoua, Ayame (in the southeast); Imam Mahmoud Samassi, founder and Imam of the Lycee Technique Mosque in Abidjan at his residence; Mohamed Sangare, assistant Imam for the Adobo Mosque in Abidjan; and Mory Fanny Cisse, an Islamic preacher.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports that government security forces forcibly searched mosques. According to the CNI, government security forces forcibly searched 7 mosques and reportedly looted residences of at least 10 Muslim leaders in Abidjan during the previous reporting period.

No action was taken in response to the April 2003 allegations by Daloa Muslim leaders that gendarmes regularly entered their mosques to conduct searches.

Unlike in the past, there were no reports that security forces detained and questioned Islamic leaders on suspicions that they were plotting with the rebel New Forces.

Unlike in the past, there were no reports that the Federation of Students and Scholars of Cote d'Ivoire student group had perpetrated violence against Muslim student groups.

Information gathering is more difficult in the rebel-held North and West. Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports of rebel New Forces intimidating or attacking Christian or other religious leaders in New Forces-held territory. A Ministry of Religion official said that Catholic priests and bishops in the north regularly hold religious services without any interference from the New Forces. In April rebel Patriotic Movement of Cote d'Ivoire Secretary-General Guillaume Soro, a Catholic, paid courtesy calls on several Catholic and Muslim leaders in New Forces-held villages. Soro told the religious leaders that the New Forces, which are often erroneously characterized in the press as being a "Muslim" rebel group, do not tolerate discrimination against any religion.

At the outset of the rebellion in September 2002, rebels in Bouake and elsewhere in the North, executed more than 100 persons. Most of those executed were Christians and members of the armed forces or persons thought to be loyal to the Government. No action was taken against rebels who beat several Buddhist missionaries traveling to Bouake in April 2003; rebels who tortured three Christian priests in Korhogo in April 2003; or rebels who tortured Maurice Dodo, a church leader in Daloa in April 2003.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no new reports of attacks on churches. There is an ongoing investigation into the killing of prominent Muslim comedian Camara Yerefe in an Abidjan church; however, no arrests have been made.

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 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 so as to use religious divisions to further political interests. One of the more prominent examples is the May 29 speech by Imam Fofana Harrisou, chairman of a pro-FPI (Ivoirian Popular Front) Muslim group, before a group of progovernment "Young Patriots." In the speech, Harrisou claimed opposition party, Rally of Republicans (RDR) had offered approximately $120,000 USD (64,323,403 XOF) to his organization if its Muslim members would "cause instability" in the country. Harrisou said he declined the offer. The Forum of Religious Confessions, which includes Muslim and Christian leaders, immediately condemned Harrisou's comments by announcing that Harrisou had no evidence to

support his claims and that his comments endangered social and religious cohesion in the country. The CNI, which is the largest Muslim group in the country, and the RDR denied Harrisou's accusations.

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 leaders of religions such as Christianity or Islam look down on practitioners of traditional indigenous religions as "pagans" or practitioners of "black magic" and human sacrifice. Although the purported practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft" is widely feared, traditional indigenous religions discourage such practices. For example, there have been no reports of human sacrifice in the country since well before independence.

The practices of traditional indigenous religions often are secret and include exclusive initiation rites, oaths of silence, and taboos against writing down orally transmitted history. Traditional indigenous religions commonly involve belief in one supreme deity as well as lesser deities or spirits that are to be praised or appeased. Some indigenous religions believe that deities and spirits inhabit or associate with particular places, natural objects, or man-made images. 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 Edimou 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 and inaugurated Blin Jacob Ediemou as the Celestial Christian leader for the country.

The Ministry of Religion took an active role in trying to end the leadership struggle that divided the Harrist community for more than 10 years. In November 2003, the Minister of Religion, along with Christian and Muslim leaders, attended the inauguration of Adolphe Mobio as the new President of the Harrist Church.

Relations between Muslims and Christians, specifically Catholics, improved during the period covered by this report. In January, to celebrate the New Year, leaders of all major religious groups and the Minister of Religion met within the Forum of Religious Groups, an NGO-inspired, interdenominational gathering. In April an interfaith memorial service was held in Abidjan to mourn those killed during the March 25 to 27 demonstrations. 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 comprises 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 of Religious Confessions.

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 discusses 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. The Public Diplomacy section hosted a forum to which all religious denominations were invited to discuss the political crisis from the perspective of religious organizations. The U.S. Government sent several religious leaders to the United States on International Visitor programs.

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 a total area of approximately 8,450 square miles, and government sources estimate its population at approximately 650,000. More than 99 percent of the population are 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. 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. Baha'i leaders reported that they were refused the right to register.

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 Mohammed's birthday, the Islamic New Year and the Ascension of the Prophet as national holidays. The country also celebrates Christmas as an official holiday.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There is no legal prohibition against proselytizing; however, proselytizing is discouraged.

Islamic law based on the Koran 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, recently created in the Ministry, is mandated to give advice on all religious issues and concerns. It is also in charge of coordinating all Islamic 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 and some nongovernmental organizations noted an increase in animosity towards non-Muslims. An Ethiopian Orthodox clergyman expressed concern over incidents of local youth throwing stones on the roof of the church. 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 Arabia or Yemen 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. Persons born as Catholics face no discrimination from Muslim relatives. In many cases, these Catholics are children or grandchildren of persons raised in French Catholic orphanages during the colonial period.

Approximately 60 percent of the Djiboutian population is ethnically Somali. In the ethnic Somali community of the country, clan membership has more influence over a person's life than does religion. Djiboutian 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 receives Ramadan greetings from Pope John Paul II. 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 periodically meet with leaders and members of religious communities and with U.S. nongovernmental organizations with a missionary component. The U.S. Embassy hosted four Iftaars during Ramadan to promote religious tolerance and understanding. Guests included all local imams as well as local businessmen, government officials, and Embassy employees.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

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

Government respect for religious freedom has improved. The Ministry of Justice and Religion relaxed administrative controls on church activities and the formation of new churches by established denominations. However, the Government remains sensitive to criticism by religious groups.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 10,827 square miles and a population of approximately 500,000. Christians account for approximately 93 percent of the population. Five percent of the population practices various traditional indigenous religions. In actuality the number of practitioners of traditional indigenous religions is much higher, although the exact figure is unknown. Many baptized Catholics reportedly still follow traditional beliefs. 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 back to the Spanish colonial period, when almost the entire population was baptized into this faith. Of the Christian population, approximately 87 percent are at least nominally Catholic, and approximately 4.5 percent belong to Protestant denominations. Christian worship tends to be concentrated in the more urbanized areas. Although in the past there has been no known organized Christian worship in large, rural parts of the country, both Catholic and Protestant church leaders report expansion into interior regions.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country, 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.

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 well-known 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 on the October 12 National Day. Another example of these preferences includes the exemption from airport entry and exit taxes that officials of the Catholic and Reform churches receive. Officials of other religions must pay.

The 1992 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 Religion oversees compliance with the 1992 decree and the registration process. This application was not required of the Catholic and Reform Churches because of their long-established presence in the country.

A religious organization must be registered formally with the Ministry of Justice and Religion before its religious activities are allowed. The application and approval process usually takes several years, but such delay appears to be the result of general bureaucratic inefficiency and not of a policy designed to impede the operation of any religious group. There were no reports that the Government refused to reg-

ister any group. Though required by the 1992 decree regulating religions, the degree of enforcement of registration requirements and other sections of this law are enforced inconsistently. Unregistered groups operating in the country can be fined; however, such fines are rarely applied. For example, the Assemblies of God received official recognition in 1993; however, from 1987 through 1993, the group was able to operate although it had not been recognized officially.

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's ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) reacted defensively to any criticism, and the Government continued to unofficially restrict freedom of expression of the clergy in that regard.

In 2002 and 2003, government agents occasionally made official and unofficial visits to monitor 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. In 2002, there were some reports that a growing international presence and the Government's focus on petroleum exploration and development resulted in a reduction of religious restrictions during the period covered by this report; however, these reports could not be confirmed.

In 2003, the Director General of the Ministry of Justice and Worship declared that churches would be required to pay a registration fee for each individual congregation in addition to the existing general register fee. The Director General claimed that this requirement was contained in the 1992 decree but had never been enforced. Consequently, he proposed applying this fee retroactively to all congregations established after a religious organization gained national recognition. Some individual government officials at the Ministry of Justice and Worship defended the full enforcement of church registration requirements to "control" rapid growth of new and unfamiliar religious groups in the country. However, within 2 months the Director General was removed from office due to heavy protests from the religious community. Since then, no action has been made to apply the former Director's General original proposal.

According to Jose Maguga, the director of the Autonomous Rural Development (DAR), a Catholic nongovernmental organization, church representatives practiced self-censorship and avoided any criticism of the Government. In 2002, the DAR was required to have a government delegate present at its meetings. This restriction apparently was in response to government fears that DAR encourages antigovernment sentiment. The Government required that the DAR office in the diocese of Ebibeyin inform the local delegate each time it held a board meeting. The DAR complied with the requirement and received permission to meet, but the local delegate insisted on being present during the meetings. The DAR refused to hold meetings with the delegate present, and consequently it did not hold official meetings during 2002.

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

On April 25, during the recent legislative and municipal elections, security forces and the Mayor of Malabo threatened a missionary pastor for removing party campaign posters of the ruling party from the walls of his church. The Mayor threatened to put the missionary in jail. He accused the pastor of being a "terrorist" and 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 Equatoguinean colleagues who asked the Mayor to excuse the missionary's behavior. Ruling party supporters later placed posters on the walls of the church. Neither the missionary nor any church member removed the newly installed posters.

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. In practice, access to study in one's own faith is generally not possible. For example, a Protes-

tant church official cited difficulties when enrolling his children at school. At the school, each child is required to lead a daily Catholic-based devotional. When the child's father requested that a teacher of the child's own faith be made available, 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.

In 2003, church leaders and foreign missionaries complained that immigration officials at Malabo's international airport had threatened denial of entry to U.S. citizens affiliated with their organizations. Some religious leaders feared that these denials were motivated by a bias against Protestant denominations.

In 2003, foreign missionaries also complained about the length of time and the new costs required to obtain residence permits that were previously cost-free. However, during the period covered by this report, the new costs associated with the previous Director General at the Ministry of Justice and Worship had been removed; however, administrative procedures still required a wait of 2 to 3 months for non-Catholic foreign missionaries. Catholic missionaries reportedly receive residence permits shortly after their arrival.

In 2001, some citizens working as missionaries received vague warnings with no specific consequences detailed from the Ministry of Justice and Religion against voting for candidates who were not PDGE members. However, these warnings made no threat in the case of noncompliance. None of the missionaries were made to appear before the Ministry and no further warnings were issued during the remainder 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 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.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, increased government respect for religious freedom contributed to the general free practice of religion. In 2003, religious leaders reported a positive relationship with the new supervising Director General at the Ministry of Justice and Worship. He has not applied fines or otherwise harassed religious leaders. For example, leaders of a Protestant church reported that the Regional Delegate for Luba began to harass their denomination's local church, prevented the establishment of new churches, and attempted to have fines imposed by the Director General at the Ministry of Justice and Worship. The church leaders took their case to the Director General. The Director General asked the Delegate to show him exactly which law had been broken. When the Delegate was unable to provide concrete reasoning for the imposition of a fine, he was warned by the Director General to stop harassing the church. After this warning, no more threats were reported and harassment decreased.

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.

There is a clear divide between the traditionally dominant Catholic Church and the rising numbers of non-Catholic congregations, especially those of the evangelical denominations. The Archbishop of Malabo has reportedly sent letters to non-Catholic churches that he believes are interfering in the lives of Catholics. For example, if a married person's spouse converts to a non-Catholic faith or if a married couple are separated and one member of the couple remarries in the Protestant church, these incidents could lead to warnings from the Catholic Archbishop.

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 staff met with various church and missionary leaders, as well as government officials in the Ministry of Justice and Worship.

In an April 2003 meeting, Embassy officers informed high-level Ministry of Justice and Worship officials of the unfair imposition of fines on non-Catholic churches. The Embassy officers claimed that these fines were not in accordance with Equatoguinean law. The officials also discussed the unequal treatment of non-Catholic missionaries. Within 2-months, the Director General was removed from office, reportedly due to heavy protests from the religious community. Since then, congregations have enjoyed good relations with the Ministry and no U.S. missionary group entering the country has reported any further visa problems.

The U.S. Embassy in Malabo re-opened in October 2003. This new facility has allowed officials to deepen contacts with the country's religious community. Together with the U.S. Embassy based in Yaounde, Cameroon, and the U.S. Consular Agent based on the mainland city of Bata, the U.S. Embassy in Malabo maintains contact with religious groups, especially American missionaries in the country, and monitors religious initiatives.

ERITREA

The Constitution, which the Government has not yet implemented, provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government severely restricted this right for all but the four government-sanctioned 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 local authorities.

The Government's poor respect for religious freedom for minority religious groups continued to decline 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 physical torture and attempts at forced recantations. Following a May 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 sanctioned religions. These closures, the Government's refusal to authorize any registrations, and the restriction on holding religious meetings 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 to this general tolerance. There also were reports that some individuals encouraged harassment of these nonsanctioned 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 a total area of 48,489 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.6 million. Although reliable statistics are not available, approximately 50 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, and approximately 40 percent is Orthodox Christian. The population also includes a small number of Eastern Rite and Roman Catholics (5 percent), Protestants (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. The population in the eastern and western lowlands predominantly is Muslim and in the highlands predominantly is Christian. There are very few atheists. Religious participation is high among all ethnic groups.

Within the country's geographic and ethnic groups, the majority of the Tigrinya are Orthodox Christian, with the exception of the Djiberti Tigrinya, who are Muslim. The majority of 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 Catholic. More than half of the Kunama are Roman Catholic, with a large minority of Muslims and some who practice traditional indigenous religions. The central and southern highland areas, which generally are more economically developed than the lowlands, predominantly are populated by Christian

Tigrinyas and some Muslim Djiberti Tigrinya and Saho. The Afar and Rashaida, as well as some of the 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 the majority of Tigre live in the western lowlands.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country, including representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim faiths. Some missionaries and representatives of the restricted nonsanctioned religious groups work in the country 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, Dutch Interchurch Aid, Norwegian Church Aid, Lutheran World Federation, 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 and Jehovah's Witnesses.

In May 2002, the Minister of Information issued a decree that all religious groups must be registered. Leaders of the nonsanctioned religious groups were warned that, until the registration applications were received and approved, no religious activities or services could be held. 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 to other religious groups already in the country, names and personal information of religious leaders, a list of group members, detailed information on assets and property owned by the group, and sources of funding from outside the country. 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 several religious groups submitted their registration documents over 2 years ago and continued to inquire with the relevant government offices. Informal comments from senior government officials suggest that no registrations will be approved in the foreseeable future.

The four government-sanctioned religious groups—Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Catholics, and members of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea—were not required to register, 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.

In 1994, a presidential decree was issued declaring that because Jehovah's Witnesses had "forsaken their nationality" by refusing to vote in the 1993 independence referendum and by avoiding national service duty, the Government would dismiss Jehovah's Witnesses from government employment, revoke their right to hold business licenses, and refuse issuance of identity or travel documents. This government action resulted in economic, employment, and travel difficulties for many members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 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 religious holidays are recognized as official holidays by the Government: Christmas (both Orthodox and non-Orthodox), Epiphany (Christian), Eid al-Fitr (Muslim), Good Friday (Christian), Easter (Christian), Eid al-Adha (Muslim), Eid al-Mewlid (Muslim), New Year (Orthodox), Meskel (Orthodox).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Islam and Orthodox Christianity are practiced widely and largely are tolerated throughout the country, with persons free to worship at the religious service of their choice. There is a centuries-old history of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between Christianity and Islam in the country. Following the May 2002 government decree that certain religious groups must register or cease all religious activities, religious facilities not belonging to the four sanctioned religious groups were forced to close. Authorities also informed nonsanctioned religious groups that a standing law would be used to stop political or other gatherings in private homes of more than three

or five persons. In practice, authorities enforced this law sporadically during the period covered by this report. Treatment of religious minorities often varied depending on local authorities. For example, some local authorities allow banned groups to worship quietly whereas others do not allow banned groups to meet at all.

The Government closely monitors the activities and movements of nonsanctioned religious groups and individual members, including nonreligious social functions attended by members. The Government also harassed and monitored some Orthodox congregations whose religious services it did not approve.

The Government denied visa applications for representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses and other groups abroad 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 from commenting on political matters. The Directorate of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Local Government monitors religious compliance with this proscription.

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 sanctioned religions. Military members reportedly are sometimes allowed to possess approved religious books to pray privately in their barracks but not in groups. Several members of nonsanctioned religious groups reportedly were arrested for violating this rule.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were numerous credible reports that over 400 members of nonsanctioned religious groups have been detained or imprisoned. Government restrictions make it difficult to determine the precise number of current religious prisoners, but it is likely over 200. These reports came from individual religious leaders, members of sanctioned and nonsanctioned religious groups, and family members of detainees.

In March, 20 members of the Kalehiwot Church were arrested while praying in a private home in Assab. Also in March, the pastor of the Medhane Alem, a component of the Orthodox Church, was arrested and released the following day. Officials report that the group is currently "under investigation."

In February, 12 members of the Full Gospel Church in Asmara reportedly were arrested while praying in a private home. They were released after approximately 1 month. Of the 12, 1 was under the age of 18 and another was handicapped—both of these detainees were released after 4 days. Also in February, 50 members of the Hallelujah Church in Asmara were arrested.

In November 2003, the pastor and seven other members of the Kale Hiwot Church in Mendefara were arrested and detained. That same month, 10 young Pentecostal women were arrested and detained at the Sawa military camp.

In August 2003, over 60 teenage Protestants engaged in compulsory military training at the Sawa military camp were detained and reportedly subjected to severe abuse because they had been caught in possession of Bibles. Authorities reportedly imprisoned the youths in metal shipping containers.

In February 2002, 74 military and national service personnel were arrested and remained imprisoned near Assab during the period covered by this report. Reports suggest they are being detained until they repudiate their faith. Some of the detainees reportedly have been rolled around in oil drums, abused by fellow prisoners, and the women sexually abused; some of the detainees reportedly suffer from partial paralysis and other physical injuries as a result of their torture. Other reports describe other individuals and groups in the military and national service who have been detained, harassed, and physically tortured for practicing nonsanctioned religions.

There were several reports that on occasion police tortured those detained for their religious beliefs, including using bondage, heat exposure, and beatings. There also were credible reports that some of the detainees were required to sign statements repudiating their faith or agreeing not to practice it as a condition for release. In some cases where detainees refused to sign, relatives were asked to do so on their behalf.

Government officials agreed at the end of the period covered by this report to discuss informally details of certain reported abuse cases. Senior Ministry of Justice officials said that it was against government policy to arrest anyone solely because

of religious affiliation. According to Ministry officials, cases of such arrests are investigated and some detainees have been released, but security officials are not punished for making wrongful arrests.

The Justice Ministry's attention reportedly resulted in the April release of approximately 14 members of the Rhema Church who had been arrested in February while praying in a private home in Asmara. The arrestees, including four adolescents, were reportedly beaten by security officials with ropes and locked in metal shipping containers at a prison facility outside the capital.

Members of other churches also reportedly were arrested without charges because of religious affiliation. In January, approximately 40 Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly were arrested while praying in a private home in Asmara. Approximately 20 members remained in detention, many reportedly in a metal shipping container at a prison outside Asmara. One of the members held in a shipping container is reportedly over 90 years old.

The Government does not excuse individuals who object to national service for religious reasons or reasons of conscience, nor does the Government allow alternative service. Most members of Jehovah's Witnesses have refused to participate in national service or to vote based upon religious beliefs, which has led to widespread criticism that they collectively were shirking their civic duty. Some Muslims also have objected to universal national service because of the requirement that women perform military duty.

Although members of other religious groups, including Muslims, reportedly have been punished in past years for failure to participate in national 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 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.

At the end of the period covered by this report, nine Jehovah's Witnesses remained in detention without charge and without being tried for failing to participate in national service. These individuals have been detained for varying periods, some for more than 9 years. The maximum official penalty for refusing to perform national service is 3 years. Ministry of Justice officials have denied that any Jehovah's Witnesses were in detention without charge, although they acknowledge that some Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of Muslims were jailed for evading national service. There were no reports that Jehovah's Witnesses who performed national service and participated in the national independence referendum were subject to discrimination.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were reports that police forced some adherents of nonsanctioned 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-sanctioned 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 religious 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 service, a refusal that is widely judged as unpatriotic. There was some social prejudice against members of the nonsanctioned religious groups. Some individuals reportedly cooperated with government authorities by reporting on and harassing those members.

Leaders of the four principal religions meet routinely and engage in efforts to foster cooperation and understanding among those religions. Of these religions, only the Catholic Church has publicly and vigorously defended the right of freedom of

conscience for all faiths. Leaders of the four principal religious organizations enjoy excellent interfaith relations.

In April, the head of the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, a quasi-governmental organization, reportedly told representatives of the four sanctioned religions that they needed to "bring back the youth" who had strayed into the non-sanctioned religions.

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 meets regularly with leaders of the religious community but has been unsuccessful at arranging meetings with the Government's Director of Religious Affairs.

The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officers have raised the cases of detentions and restrictions on nonsanctioned religious groups with government 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.

Two senior staff from the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to the country and met with senior government officials to discuss religious prisoners, religious freedom, and freedom of conscience. There were also meetings with members of religious organizations.

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 infringed on this right.

There was no 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 and cemeteries, but there were reports during the period covered by this report 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, intrareligious tension and government criticism increased among Muslims, which divided traditionalists from the stricter fundamentalists.

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 435,186 square miles, and its population is approximately 71 million. Approximately 40 to 45 percent of the population adheres 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 Muslim, although many Muslims claim that the actual percentage is higher. Addis Ababa has 1 million Muslims, according to the Supreme Islamic Council. Islam is most prevalent in the Somali and Afar regions, as well as in all the major parts of Oromia. Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism continue to be the fastest growing faiths and 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 a high estimate. Established Protestant churches such as Mekane Yesus (with 4.03 million members—an increase of 195,000 in 2003) and the Kale Hiwot followers (with 4.6 million members) are strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Regional State (SNNPRS), western and central Oromia, and in urban areas around the country. In Gambella in the western part of the country, where ethnic clashes broke out in December 2003, the 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 there are now 22 denominations

under their religious umbrella and that the number of adherents increased by 4 million in the period covered by this report.

There are more than 7,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. Oriental Rite and Latin Rite Roman Catholics (Roman Catholics number 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, there are those who claim that their ancestors were forced to convert from Judaism to Ethiopian Orthodoxy (Feles Mora). There are very few atheists. Although precise data is not available, active participation in religious services is high throughout the country.

A large number of foreign missionary groups operate in the country, including Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Protestant organizations, operating under the umbrella of the 22-member Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia, sponsor or support missionary work: 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). There also is missionary activity by Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the 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; however, on occasion government authorities infringed on this right. The Constitution requires the separation of religion and the state and prohibits a state religion, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. The Federal Government interfered during 2003 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, like nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), are registered with the Ministry of Justice and must renew their registration every 3 years. The new registration policy obliging churches to re-register every 3 years went into effect in December 2002, supplanting a previous annual registration requirement. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) stated that the change in the registration requirement does not reflect any 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. Evangelical Church Fellowship representatives reported that they met with the Speaker of the House (Parliament) in December 2002 and complained about the registration requirement, requesting that they be treated equally with other groups. The Speaker assured the leaders that the issue would be discussed in Parliament. However, the Chairman of Parliament's Social Affairs Committee does not recall Parliament ever discussing the matter. The Roman Catholic Nuncio in the country has written repeatedly to the Prime Minister's office seeking a reversal of this policy. However, there was no change in the government policy during the period covered by this report. The Mekane Yesus leadership confirmed their frustration with the registration requirement of every 3 years as well and sent their complaints to the Ministry of Justice by means of a document signed by Mekane Yesus, the Evangelical Fellowship, and the Roman Catholics. The statement requested that religions be placed in a "different status than NGOs." The president of Mekane Yesus stated that the lack of feedback from the Government on this issue makes it clear that the present leadership does not treat all religions equally.

Unlike NGOs, religious groups are not subject to a rigorous registration process. Under current law, any religious organization that undertakes development activities must register its development wing separately as an NGO. 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. Failure to register results in the lack of any legal standing. For example, any organization that does not register with the Ministry of Justice would not be

allowed to open a bank account and would be severely disadvantaged in any court of law.

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 during the period covered by this report.

The Meserte Kristos/Mennonite Church suffered a setback during the period covered by this report. Although the Derg seized their church and church school many years ago, the Church was able to reclaim its building with the fall of Mengistu. The Church received permission to reclaim the building for worship, but the adjacent Sunday school building was converted to a government school, a deviation from extant provisions protecting land used for prayer houses and cemeteries from government reclamation (unless they had been built illegally). After the Church received a letter in November 2003 stating it could not continue to use the building for worship and had to vacate the premises, the Government seized the church building to use it as part of the government school on the same compound.

After reports 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. In 2001 a charter signed by the Roman Catholics, Mekane Yesus, and the Evangelical Church Fellowship was presented to the Speaker of the House requesting a federal arbitrator. According to the president of the Mekane Yesus Church, the Government considered the request; 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 school 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 Koran 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 Arefa, Moulid, and Id Al Fetir (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 the launching of the National Partnership Forum against HIV/AIDS in the country, all principal religious leaders were present in the forum organization. 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.

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. 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 Papal Nuncio of the country reported that Roman Catholic religious workers, unless linked to development work, have a difficult time gaining work permits. This is a

common problem facing religious groups except for Muslims and Orthodox Christians.

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. Charges against two journalists detained and charged with defamation in 2001 after writing articles critical of the EOC were pending at the end of the period covered by this report. Also during the reporting period, the EHRCO reported that no journalists had been detained or charged 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.

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, the leaders reported that the Ministry of Education (MOE) has accepted the practice of headscarves in schools not only in Addis Ababa but in regional areas as well. In the Southern Nations and Dire Dawa, there have been scattered problems but the local Islamic Council has addressed them. Three years ago the problems with headscarves centered on the complete covering (hijab) worn by some female students. The EIASC does not support this position, which they claim originates in the Middle East and not from the Koran.

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 seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders have complained that because they are perceived as "newcomers," they remain at a disadvantage compared with the EOC and the EIASC in the allocation of land.

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 there, 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; however, 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.

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 free.

The Government has not returned to the Mekane Yesus Church some properties that had been seized under the Mengitsu regime, including three student hostels and two schools. The Mekane Yesus leadership stated that these issues were still pending. The Church has been attempting to repossess the Sidist Kilo hostel building for the past 16 years, with no resolution. Only the headquarters building has been returned to the Church; ownership of the remaining property was unresolved. The issue of providing adequate space for churches within Addis Ababa continued to be a major issue among Protestant groups. Protestants noted that the Orthodox Church has built at least 20 churches within the past 2 years, but no other groups have been able to construct new edifices.

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

A March 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 July 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.

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 during the period covered by this report. 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 religious groups.

Followers of evangelical and Pentecostal churches continued to complain about favoritism given to Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and their churches. During the period covered by this report, no major clashes occurred between Protestants and members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, although there were reports of clashes between Muslims and members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well as between the Protestants and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church during the period covered by the previous report.

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 that has required police intervention to protect them while proselytizing. 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 Orthodox customs. Muslims report that some Pentecostal preachers disparage Islam in their services. There were complaints by Muslim and Protestant leaders that the EOC's desire to "show supremacy" sometimes caused irritation in the regions.

The Roman Catholic Church has reported good relations with the Supreme Islamic Council as well as with the Mekane Yesus and EOC leadership, while the non-Orthodox Church leaders continue to address the "supremacy issue" exhibited by the EOC. There is a higher degree of respect between the Roman Catholic Church and the EOC than between the EOC and Protestant religions. The Catholic Church does not actively try to convert EOC members to Catholicism. Protestant religions, particularly Mekane Yesus, actively try to convert Orthodox followers, resulting in the charge by Protestants of the EOC's exhibited supremacy.

An investigation by the Federal Police into the November and December 2002 confrontations between members of Lideta Maryam Orthodox Parish in Addis Ababa and EOC officials in which police officers raided the church compound and forcibly dispersed members of the congregation concluded that police officers acted properly and did not use excessive force. According to the Federal Police, an off-duty soldier—not a policeman—killed a man who was outside the church compound. The soldier remained in army custody. According to the EHRCO, police indiscriminately beat many persons in the compound, including nuns, monks, elderly women, and other bystanders, including two journalists. The EHRCO also reported that, after the raid, police detained approximately 700 persons at Kolfe police training camp and subjected them to physical abuse; however, the Federal Police estimated that the number of detainees was about 300. Police required them to sign statements under duress admitting to their roles in inciting riots at the church before they could be released. At the end of the period covered by this report, no one remained in custody for involvement in those confrontations.

In most sections of the country, 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 throughout the country. The new challenge of Wahhabism and the lack of tolerance for others have disturbed the more traditional Ethiopian

Muslims of the present EIASC. Members of the EIASC state that the Wahhabists believe in supremacy and do not tolerate a mix of Muslims and Christians. The majority of Ethiopian Muslims continued to enjoy collegial relationships with their neighbors, attending cross cultural and religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. The Wahhabists within the country shun this type of social mixing.

In the capital, Addis Ababa, persons of different faiths often live side-by-side. Most urban areas reflect a mixture of all religious denominations. 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.

Clashes between Muslims and Orthodox Christians were minimal during the period covered by this report. However, the Evangelical Fellowship reported conflicts between Protestants and Muslims and also between Protestants and Orthodox Christians.

Leaders of the EIASC struggled with Wahhabist fundamentalism within their ranks during the period covered by this report. The growing influence of intolerant elements within Islamic communities in the country, aided by funding from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states for mosque construction and social services, continued to concern the Council.

In January 2004, the Council voted to remove all executive members of the Council, 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.

The evangelicals of Kotebe reported that in December 2003 locals on their way to church beat worshippers coming to the Ethiopian Gospel Deliverance Church. While the incident was reported to the police, neither police officials nor the local administration took any action.

In December 2003, the current leader of the Evangelical Fellowship received a letter from the Mahabare Kedusan (an ultra-conservative Orthodox group) that had been circulated among Sunday school groups in Addis Ababa). The letter named the pastor specifically and accused him of attempting to "dismantle the Orthodox Church." In December 2002, there was an article in an independent Addis Ababa newspaper that mentioned specific names of individuals in the evangelical movement and accused them of trying to undermine the Orthodox Church.

In 2002, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the chairman of the EIASC, the Archbishop of the Ethiopian Church, and the president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus met with their Eritrean counterparts and officials from the Eritrean Foreign Ministry in Eritrea. The religious leaders then traveled to the country to continue their discussions. They issued statements appealing for peace and reconciliation between the two countries. No further progress on this issue was noted during the period covered by this report.

In 2002, in the Gurage zone (Muhur and Aklil Woreda), evangelical believers were beaten, their property taken, and their houses destroyed. By the end of the period covered by this report, there had been no resolution. The victims alleged the police have not been helpful either in giving them assistance or bringing the perpetrators to justice.

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 after the burial and dumped it in town. Members of the family reported the incident to the local police and zonal administration, but authorities took little action to resolve the case. The evangelicals claim that they are not able to bury their dead in cemeteries given to them by the Government because the Muslims and Orthodox refuse to allow it. In Harar evangelicals also were not able to bury their dead in the same cemeteries used by the Orthodox and Muslims.

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 aims. Embassy officials also made an active effort to visit all of the religious groups and religious 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 to promote HIV/AIDS awareness. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) continued to work with the Ethiopian Orthodox Development Assistance

Authority to provide food commodities and grants to support food security programs in four areas. USAID supported a variety of programs through Catholic Relief Services, World Vision International, and Family Health International. USAID continued to work with the EOC and Mekane Yesus Church, as well as with the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church and the Missionaries of Charity Sisters, to support HIV/AIDS programs. During the period covered by this report, the EOC received a $5 million grant from USAID for the next 3 years to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Orthodox communities.

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 a total area of 103,347 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 million. Major religions practiced in the country include Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism), Islam, and traditional indigenous religions. Government statistics 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 constitute approximately 20 percent of the population; as a result, Muslims make up a much larger proportion of the total population. 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, which the Government promulgated on the grounds that Jehovah's Witnesses allegedly do not adequately protect individuals who might dissent from the group's views, 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, usually once every year or every other year.

The Government celebrates Christian and Muslim holidays as national holidays; these include Easter Sunday and Monday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, Christmas, Aid El Kebir, and Aid El 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 made uncorroborated claims that it 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 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.

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 inter-religious violence or intra-religious incidents during the period covered by this report.

There have been credible reports indicating incidents of violence in which practitioners of some traditional indigenous religions inflicted bodily harm on other persons. The Ministry of the Interior has stated 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 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 a total area of 4,361 square miles, and its population is 1,364,507. Sunni Muslims constitute 90 percent of the population. The vast majority are Malikite Sufis, of which the main orders represented are Tijaniyah, Qadiriyah, Muridiyah, and Ahmadiyah. Except for Ahmadiyah Sufis, all orders pray together at common mosques. A small percentage of Muslims, predominately immigrants from South Asia, do not ascribe to any traditional Islamic school of thought.

An estimated 9 percent of the population practices Christianity and 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 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.

The Government considers the following religious holidays national holidays: Tobaski (Eid-al-Adha), Yaomul Ashora, Mawlud al-Nabi, Koriteh (Eid al-Fitr), Good Friday, 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 Koranic 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 and Baptist churches, discusses matters of importance to Christians in the country.

In April 2003, approximately 70 Muslim students at St. Theresa's Upper Basic School, a Catholic Mission school that offers both Koranic and Biblical Studies in addition to the national academic curriculum, wore veils to school to protest the school uniform policy that forbade any headwear. In May 2003, after closing the school due to the subsequent controversy, the Department of State for Education issued a letter of instruction to all schools stating "veil wearing should be allowed" and "no child or student should be sent away from school for wearing a veil." In July 2003, President Jammeh reversed the Department's decision to allow students to wear veils to school and pronounced that each school administration should determine its own policy. During the period covered by this report, like before the controversy, Muslim school uniforms included headscarves while Christian school uniforms did not.

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. Intermarriage between members of different religious groups is legal and socially acceptable.

Practitioners of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the country firmly believe that Islam mandates the practice and its surrounding rites. 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, well-respected local Muslim leaders continue to speak out against 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. In particular, the U.S. Embassy was able to promote interfaith dialogue by sending religious leaders on International Visitor Programs. One participant, a prominent Muslim Imam, joined other Muslim clerics at a U.S. Government-sponsored symposium to discuss his experiences and to describe what he learned about religious freedom during his visit.

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 a total land 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 country's population is Christian, 15.6 percent is Muslim, and 15.4 percent adheres to traditional indigenous religions or other religions. The Muslim community has protested these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is closer to 30 percent. To clarify the possible discrepancy, suggestions have been made by religious and government leaders to include religious identity on national citizenship cards, when a national citizen register is established. Other religions include the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Ninchiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckanker, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, Rastafarianism, and other international faiths, as well as some separatist or spiritual churches which 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 in the country. Atheism does not have a strong presence since most persons have some spiritual and traditional beliefs.

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. Christianity often includes an overlay of traditional beliefs. No figure of the number of persons who attend services was available.

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 a characteristic of traditional indigenous religions because ancestors also provide a link between the supreme being and the living and at times may be reincarnated. The religious leaders of those sharing these diverse

beliefs commonly are referred to as priests and are trained in the arts of healing and divination. These priests typically operate shrines to the supreme deity or to one of the lesser gods, and rely upon the donations of the public to maintain the shrine and for their own maintenance. One known group, Afrikania, also known as the Afrikan Renaissance Mission (ARM), actively supports traditional religious practices. Afrikania often criticizes the Government, foreign diplomatic missions, and NGOs for corrupting traditional values and imposing 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 orientations are represented in the country: the Wahhabi-oriented Ahlussuna, the Tijanis, 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 of the country. The majority of the followers of more traditional religions mainly reside in the rural areas of the country. Christians live throughout the country.

Religions considered new or "foreign" to the country include the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Ninchiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckankar, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, and Rastafarianism.

Foreign missionaries operate freely in the country, 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 $.56 (approximately 5,000 cedis) for the application form, approximately $4 for the registration form and approximately $69 (approximately 610,000 cedis) for the registration. Applicants are required to renew their registration annually for approximately $17. Registration is a formality only, 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 wishes of the individual.

The Government often takes steps to promote interfaith understanding. At government meetings and receptions, there generally is a multidenominational invocation usually led by religious leaders from various faiths. The Government recognizes Christian, Muslim, and secular holidays throughout the calendar year. Regional and local government authorities have successfully implemented recommendations of a 2001 Joint Parliamentary Committee to resolve problems in the Ga traditional area surrounding the annual ban on drumming prior to the Ga's Homowo Festival (see Section III).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government did not always prosecute those responsible for religious violence; however, the Government increased its prosecution of violent acts, including religious violence. All incidents of religious violence were prosecuted during the period covered by this report.

Ministry of Education regulations state that public school authorities should not force students of minority religious groups to worship with the majority religious groups in school. The Minister of Education also directed all schools to respect the religious rights of all students. During the period covered by this report, Muslim organizations reported that while there were a few isolated reports of disrespect for the directive, Muslim students generally experienced greater religious freedom in public schools. In a few cases reported by the Director of the Islamic Education Unit in the Greater Accra Region, some school authorities even went beyond what is re-

quired to ensure the freedom of Muslim students to practice their religious 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.

In April 2003, the Federation of Muslim Students criticized the decision of authorities at the University of Ghana to halt the construction of a mosque in one of the campus residential halls, which would have provided a more centrally located place of worship for Muslim students. Currently, there are different Christian denominations that have designated places of worship within the university's five residence halls. Prior to the Federation's request for a similar institution to accommodate Muslim students, only one mosque—very remotely located from the main residence area—existed for this purpose. University officials initially approved the request for a centrally located mosque but then stopped construction on the grounds that the project did not fit into the university's architectural design. The Federation perceived this as an act of religious discrimination and voiced its concerns in April 2003. The controversy was resolved in March when university authorities designated several temporary spaces in residence halls where Muslim students could practice their faith. The Federation and university authorities have agreed to the construction of a centrally located mosque but no action has been taken.

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 generally amicable relations between the various religious communities, and spokesmen for these communities often advocate tolerance toward different religions; however, there was some 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.

Unlike in the past, there were no reports of violence between practitioners of the ethnic Ga tradition and members of some charismatic churches over the Ga traditional leaders' annual ban on drumming and noise making prior to the Ga's Homowo (harvest) festival. The Gas are the original inhabitants of Accra, and some consider the Ga tradition to be a religion. Ga traditionalists maintain that their beliefs should be respected, while some Christians resent the imposition of bans, which they believe infringes on their right to worship.

Following several incidents of violence reported during the 2001 ban on drumming, the Government made extensive efforts to mediate between charismatic Christians and ethnic Ga traditionalists. A parliamentary committee examined the ban on drumming and noise-making and recommended that local government authorities establish a monitoring team to enforce existing by-laws regarding noise levels throughout the year and encourage dialogue between all parties. The Ga Traditional Council and the Forum of Religious Bodies agreed that during the ban, drumming and noise making by churches should not exceed the decibel level proscribed by existing law. Regional and city authorities formed a monitoring team comprised of police, the Environmental Protection Agency, and city and traditional authorities to ensure that existing noise regulations were enforced throughout the year and not only during the period of the ban. A public education campaign also was launched to urge charismatic churches to respect existing law.

There were occasional reports of interreligious and intrareligious incidents but no violent incidents based on religious affiliation. There were no reports of intra-Muslim violence during the period covered by this report; however, tensions continued between members of the Tijanniya and Ahlussuna groups throughout the country. Muslim organizations are working to decrease intra-Muslim tensions through education and conflict resolution exercises.

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. A virgin girl, sometimes under the age of 10, but often in her teens, is given by her family to work and be trained in traditional religion at a fetish shrine for a period lasting between several weeks and 3 years as a means of atonement for an allegedly heinous crime committed by a member of the girl's fam-

ily. In exceptional cases, when a girl of suitable age or status is unavailable, a boy can be offered. The girl, who is known as a Trokosi or a Fiashidi, then becomes the property of the shrine god and the charge of the shrine priest for the duration of her stay. As a charge of the priest, the girl works in the shrine and undergoes instruction in the traditional indigenous religion. She helps with the upkeep of the shrine, which may include working on the shrine's farm, drawing water, and performing other agricultural or household labor. 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 her atonement period. In the past, there were reports that the priests subjected the girls to sexual abuse; however, while instances of abuse may occur on a case-by-case basis, there is no evidence that sexual or physical abuse is an ingrained or 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. During the girl's stay, 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, the girl's 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 particular stigma attaching to her status as a former Trokosi shrine participant. In very occasional cases, the family abandons the girl or cannot afford the cost of the final rites, in which case she may remain at the shrine indefinitely. 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. Generally former Trokosi girls continue to associate themselves with the shrine into adulthood, making voluntary visits for ceremonies. In many instances, when a Trokosi woman dies, even years or decades after she has completed her service and resumed her life in the village, her family is expected to replace her with another young girl, thus continuing the association of the family to the shrine from generation to generation.

Reports on the number of women and girls bound to various Trokosi shrines vary; however, shrines rarely have more than four girls serving their atonements at any one time. According to credible reports from international observers, there were no more than 100 girls serving at Trokosi shrines throughout the Volta Region (see Section IV).

During the period covered by this report, reports by several NGOs indicated that the incidence of Trokosi was declining considerably.

Comprehensive legislation protects women's and children's rights and includes a ban on ritual servitude, which many activists interpreted to include Trokosi. 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 parts of the country. 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 lynched if they return to their villages. The law provides protection for alleged witches.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to prosecute violence against suspected witches. In the past, human rights NGOs estimated that the number of occupants of the witches' camp was growing; however, there are no definitive statistics regarding the number of women living in northern witchcamps, and international and domestic observers estimate that there are fewer than 850 women in the camps. The government-funded Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (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. Various organizations provide food, medical care, and other forms of support to the residents of the camps.

There were no developments, nor were any likely, in the 2001 case in which members of the Christo Asafo Christian church clashed with members of the Boade Baaka traditional shrine at Taifa, greater Accra Region, after shrine members accused a Christian woman of witchcraft.

In July 2002, tensions between a local church and the traditional council led a mob to set fire to the church's worship center in Techiman, Brong-Ahafo Region. No injuries were reported. Traditional authorities have denied involvement in the fire. Those who follow traditional practices in the area have accused the church of preaching against the traditional Apoo Festival and ban on fishing on the Tano River. Traditional authorities ban fishing on certain days of the week and for festival periods during certain months. The reasons for the ban are partly superstitious and partly ecological since it is believed that the brief ban on fishing will replenish the community's fish stock. The ban is generally respected. This incident was an isolated case in which one church was accused of preaching against the widely accepted custom. The Techiman District Security investigated the incident in 2003. The District Security Committee advocated that local religious leaders refrain from making insubstantial claims and using intemperate language. Both sides of the conflict have agreed to respect each other's beliefs and no disturbances have arisen during the period covered by this report.

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

For the period covered by this report, there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts by the Government or private citizens. There were occasional and isolated anti-Semitic sentiments expressed in a bi-weekly independent newspaper. The publication has an annual circulation of about 48,000 and generally supports the opposition political party.

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 the U.S. Embassy since 2002. In the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy hosted several Muslims through the International Visitors Program. The Embassy sponsored Iftaar programs during Ramadan in 2003, to which both Muslim and Christian leaders were invited. Throughout 2003, the U.S. Embassy, Peace Corps, and U.S. Agency for International Development hosted several roundtable discussions with Muslim leaders in the Accra and Kumasi regions to raise awareness of potential long-term programming and short-term project opportunities to benefit Muslim communities. Representatives from the U.S. Embassy were present at a Religious Interfaith Cooperation Seminar in December 2003 and continue to meet with different religious NGOs and traditional leaders on a regular basis. During the April Earth Day Celebration, the Embassy, as part of its Muslim outreach effort, promoted the use of energy efficient stoves in an impoverished neighborhood in Accra that is predominantly Muslim.

U.S. Embassy officers 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, the ban on drumming, and incidents of interreligious and intrareligious conflict (see Section III).

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.

Relations between the various religions generally are amicable. 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 a total area of 94,926 square miles, and its population is an estimated 8.4 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 in the country 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 Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist, and other Christian evangelical churches 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 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 Djalon 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, formerly the National Islamic League (NIL), 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, the Government reportedly favors Muslims over non-Muslims.

Unlike in the past, there were no reports that the Government required government ministers to take an oath on either the Koran or the Bible.

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

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

All religious groups newly operating in the country are required to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration with the Government entitles religious organizations to VAT exemptions on incoming shipments and some energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate in the country; however, without official recognition, they were 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 though 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.

There were reports during the year that the Government, under a previously unused law, began requiring foreign members of missionary and church groups to pay a visa fee. In previous years, visas were free for members of church groups.

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, which included religious instruction in their curriculum, the vast majority of students attend secular public schools.

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

There are a few scattered madrassas, 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 madrassas were not linked with the public school system and were not recognized by the Government. As with other private schools, madrassas 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 primarily in Conakry but there are some throughout the 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 included the Inter-Religious Council in dialogue efforts with opposition parties on electoral and governmental reform during the period covered by this report. 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 interreligious 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. On at least one occasion, the Government refused to allow the opening of a foreign-funded Shi'a Islamic school; otherwise, the religious activities of these 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. Conversions of senior officials to Islam, such as the former Defense Minister, are ascribed to the Ministry's efforts to influence the religious beliefs of senior government leaders. Nevertheless, non-Muslims are represented in the Cabinet, administrative bureaucracy, and the armed forces. However, the Government refrains from appointing non-Muslims to important administrative positions in certain parts of the country, in deference to the particularly 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 the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between 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.

In June, a violent clash between Muslim Malinke and Christian Guerze ethnic groups left two dead in Nzerekore. The incident was prompted more by ethnic rather than religious tensions. It represents a continuation of the long-simmering ethnic tensions that resulted in similarly violent clashes in 1992 and 2000.

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 sponsors lectures and seminars that provide information on the religious diversity found in American society. The Embassy's American Center sponsored an exhibit on "Muslim Life in America" that included reading material, a documentary, and a poster show. The Embassy also distributed copies of the U.S. Government-sponsored Arabic language magazine, "Hi", to imams and mosques in Conakry. The Embassy sponsored a tour of Conakry's Grand Mosque for members of the expatriate American community. Similarly, the Ambassador and an Embassy delegation visited a historic mosque in Dinguiraye, in northern Guinea, and held a discussion with Muslim clerics there. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials also met with the leaders of the Ministry of the National Islamic League.

GUINEA-BISSAU

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 13,948 square miles, and its population is 1,388,363. Approximately 49 percent of the population follows traditional indigenous or animist religious practices, 38 percent of the population are Muslim, and estimates for the percentage of Christians range from 5 to 13 percent. 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. The Muslim population is concentrated in 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.

Missionaries from numerous Christian denominations long have been active. Numerous foreign missionary groups 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 religious holiday considered a national holiday.

The Government requires that religious groups be licensed and did not refuse 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. There were no reports of government harassment or expulsion of religious associations. In 2003, the Ahmadiya, an Islamic religious group expelled from the

country in 2001, was permitted to return after the Government determined that former President Yala's decision to expel 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 tolerant on religious matters.

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. However, since there is no U.S. Embassy in Bissau, the U.S. Embassy in Dakar, Senegal, handled all official contact with Guinea-Bissau. Local employees staff the U.S. Office in Bissau and American diplomats from the Embassy in Dakar travel frequently to Bissau to conduct normal diplomatic relations.

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

KENYA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Constitution does not provide for an official 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. However, some Muslim leaders have charged that the Government is hostile toward Muslims.

There generally is a great level of tolerance among religious groups; however, some Muslims continued to perceive themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in a predominantly Christian country. There are some interfaith movements and political alliances, but one of the main alliances, the Ufungamano Initiative, faltered 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 a total area of approximately 225,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 32 million, of which approximately 88 percent lives in rural areas. According to official government figures, Protestants are the largest religious group, representing approximately 38 percent of the population. Approximately 28 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Seven percent of the population practices Islam, 1 percent practices Hinduism, and the remainder follows various traditional indigenous religions or offshoots of Christian religions. There are very few atheists. Muslim groups dispute government estimates; most often they claim to represent 15 to 20 percent of the population, sometimes even higher.

Members of most religious groups are active throughout the country. Certain religions dominate particular regions. For example, Muslims dominate North Eastern Province, where the population is chiefly Somali. Muslims also dominate Coast Province, except for the western areas of the province, which predominantly are Christian. Eastern Province is approximately 50 percent Muslim (mostly in the

north) and 50 percent Christian (mostly in the south). The rest of the country largely is Christian, with some persons practicing traditional indigenous religions.

Many foreign missionary groups operate in the country, 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. The 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. The Government is currently involved in this dispute in its efforts to write a new constitution. Religious groups have also voiced their concerns over a proposed anti-terrorism bill and over 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. Article 66 of the Constitution provides for the establishment of Kadhis' courts where "all the parties profess the Muslim religion" in suits relating to "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 High Court has jurisdiction to supervise any civil or criminal proceedings before a subordinate court. It also indicates that if a constitutional or legal interpretation question arises in a Kadhis' court proceeding, any party involved in the proceedings may refer the question to the High Court. For example, in May, the High Court overruled a decision made by the Chief Khadi (Islamic judge) that a matrimonial dispute in the town of Kisumu in the western part of the country should be transferred to Mombasa on the Indian Ocean coast.

In March, the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC), which began its work in April 2003, completed a new draft constitution. Article 9 of the draft constitution states that the State and religion shall be separate, that there shall be no state religion, and that the State shall treat all religions equally. Article 48 provides for freedom of religious expression, protects the rights of religious communities to provide religious instruction in places of education, proscribes discrimination in employment based on religious belief, and prohibits any person from compelling another person to engage in any practice that is contrary to that person's religious beliefs. Articles 198 and 199 retain Kadhis' courts as subordinate courts with essentially the same jurisdictions as are included in the Constitution. However, unlike in the current Constitution, the draft constitution does not mention a minimum or maximum number of Kadhis' courts, nor does it specify how the Kadhis will be selected.

The political debate over the draft constitution has revolved mainly around issues such as the role of the executive branch and the devolution of authority to sub-national units of government. The articles regarding the Kadhis' courts have highlighted latent religious animosities between the country's Muslims and Christians. In 2003, an interfaith group launched a separate initiative to draft a constitution. This effort, called the Ufungamano Initiative, originally included both Christians and Muslims. However, when the Muslims realized that the Christians opposed including Kadhis' courts in the new constitution, they withdrew.

Some Christian clerics argue that Muslims will be given preferential treatment if Kadhis' courts are incorporated into the new constitution. The National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCK) states that it is not opposed to Kadhis' courts as such. They agree that Parliament should have the right to establish these courts or any other subordinate court. However, they argue that including Kadhis' courts in the constitution would grant formal recognition to Islam, which contradicts the provisions of Article 9 in the draft constitution proscribing the establishment of any religion. Some opponents of Kadhis' courts also contend that the courts' inclusion in the constitution could pave the way for the full application of Shari'a law in the country. In May 2004, a group of 34 Protestant churches, allied under the name of the Federation of Churches in Kenya, threatened to take legal action to expunge Article 66, which establishes Khadis' courts, from the draft constitution. The Catholic Church believes that Parliament should adopt the provisions of the draft constitution that are not in dispute and subject contentious issues to a popular referendum.

Proponents of Kadhis' courts argue that other religious groups could establish their own courts if necessary. Some also argue that the Kadhis' courts should be seen as a matter concerning the judiciary and not religion. 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. Moreover, they argue that the proposed constitutional provision does not signify the full application of Shari'a law in the future. In May 2004, two leading Muslim groups, the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, threatened protests and strikes if the draft constitution was not adopted in its entirety. By the end of this reporting period, the effort to adopt a new constitution remained stalemated.

In April 2003, the Government published the Suppression of Terrorism Bill. Many observers, including the 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 members of their community. In June 2004, the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, referring to the arrest of some 30 Muslims on terrorism charges, accused the Government of targeting Muslims and applying the bill even before it is enacted. In 2003, the Law Society of Kenya produced an amended version of the bill that eliminated or revised the articles to which the religious and human rights groups most objected. However, in June 2004, the Council of Imams and Preachers called for rejection of even the amended version of the bill. The Suppression of Terrorism Bill has not yet been voted on in Parliament, and the debate was still ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

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-free status, including exemption from paying duty on imported goods. Applications for tax exemptions are not automatic but are granted 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 claims that the Government revoked its exempt status because the Church supported opposition political groups.

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. The Government has not granted registration to the Tent of the Living God, a small Kikuyu religious order banned during the single-party era (pre-1992). However, since the arrival of a multiparty system in 1992, membership in the Tent of the Living God has decreased greatly. It is still not registered and has made no recent attempts to do so.

Political parties also must register with the Government. Despite 1997 reforms and the subsequent registration of a large number of political parties, 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, offended the "secular principle" of the Constitution.

In the areas of the country 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 the Government and the church have a stake in 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 the closing of schools. In its May 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 schools. The report found that the AIC compelled all students admitted to its schools to adhere to AIC beliefs, which contradicts the Constitution.

Islamic institutions sponsor a few public schools that the Government supports through the employment of teachers and the provision of equipment. Some members of the Muslim community 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 of the country. Throughout the period covered by this report, some Muslims voiced opposition to a planned government program, financed in part by the U.S. Government, which would work with Islamic schools to improve the quality

and efficiency of primary education. They charge 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. Rather, some organizations—both secular and religious—have been assigned a series of regional broadcasting frequencies to give their broadcasts national reach. These include Radio Iqra (Muslim), Radio Baraka FM Radio (interdenominational Christian), Waumini (Catholic), Hope FM (Pentecostal), and Family Radio FM (interdenominational Christian). In addition, HOPE Radio of the Pentecostal Church of East Africa began broadcasting in Nairobi in 2003.

The Government celebrates several religious holidays as national holidays, including Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Idd-ul-Fitr, and Idd'ul-Azha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, some Muslim leaders have charged that the Government is hostile toward Muslims. They complain that non-Muslims receive better treatment when requesting citizenship documents. According to these leaders, authorities more rigorously scrutinize the identification cards of persons with Muslim surnames and require them to present additional documentation of their citizenship, such as birth certificates of parents and, sometimes, grandparents. The Government has singled out the overwhelmingly Muslim ethnic Somalis as the only group whose members are issued and required to carry an additional form of identification to prove that they are citizens. They must produce upon demand their national identification card and a second identification card verifying screening. Both cards also are required to apply for a passport. The Government says that this heightened scrutiny is an attempt to deter illegal immigration, rather than to discriminate against the religious affiliation of ethnic Somalis. Muslim leaders claim that since the 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, the November 2002 terrorist attacks in Mombasa, and terrorist attacks elsewhere, government discrimination against their community has worsened, especially demands for identity documents.

In the past, the misuse of authority by mainly Christian security forces in the northeast, which largely is Muslim and in which banditry is widespread, had contributed to Muslim mistrust. However, during the period covered by this report, there continued to be greater inclusion of Muslims in security forces and provincial administration. For example, in April the Government named Brigadier General Mohammed Hussein Ali, a Muslim, as the new Commissioner of Police.

The former Minister of Trade and Industry Nicholas Biwott also has been engaged in a public dispute since 1998 with the Catholic Church over an intended project to use public land to create an educational facility to be named after the Minister's mother. Father Michael Rop, who is in charge of the local parish where the facility is proposed, protested the appropriation of public land to honor Biwott's mother. The Bishop of Eldoret, Cornelius Korir, accused Biwott of harassing Father Rop and his supporters and claimed that the former Minister was persecuting the church and its followers. The dispute culminated in a confrontation between Biwott's supporters and the Catholic Church in July 2001 when armed police attempted to block Bishop Korir from entering Father Rop's church. Biwott has vowed to continue with the building project. Church supporters who oppose the project destroyed the site's perimeter fencing in 2003. The dispute was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

In June 2002, in Busia, a district officer who was a Seventh-day Adventist was suspended for refusing to perform his official duties on Madaraka Day, which fell on a Saturday. During the same month, in Nandi, the Board of Governors suspended 10 high school students, who were Seventh-day Adventists, for refusing to take a test on a Saturday. Supporters of the students challenged the board's decision, arguing that the school did not have the constitutional right to deny individuals the right to observe their religious practices. No further information was available at the end of the period covered by this report.

In May 2004, members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church claimed that they were among hundreds of workers that were fired by private companies operating in Nairobi's Export Processing Zone. The church members claimed that they lost their jobs because they refused to work on Saturdays.

Unlike in the past, there were no reports that religious meetings at the Emmanuel Church of God were restricted.

The Government historically has been unsympathetic to tribal religious groups that have engendered protest movements. The Government frequently harassed and periodically arrested and detained members of the Mungiki, a cultural and political movement based in part on Kikuyu ethnic traditions, which espouses political views and cultural practices that are controversial in mainstream society. While religion may have played a role in the formation of the Mungiki, observers believe that it is no longer a key characteristic of the group. The Mungiki do not adhere to any single religion, and members are free to choose their own religion; the group includes Muslims and Christians. The number of Mungiki members is unknown, but the group draws a significant following from the unemployed and other marginalized segments of society.

Mungiki members have been accused of extortion, killings, illegal drug sales, and for-hire vigilantism. In February, a group of Mungiki defectors charged a Mungiki leader with kidnapping another defector. In March, the police arrested 30 Mungiki members, including the alleged kidnapper, charging them with various crimes, including the killings of group defectors. Subsequently, the police rounded up 100 additional persons alleged to be Mungiki, including 2 police officers, and later 83 were released. In May and June, one of the released prisoners was beheaded and a young woman with alleged connections to Mungiki was also killed. Observers believe that as many as 14 killings or disappearances of former Mungiki in the period from February to June 2004 were meant to punish Mungiki defectors. At the end of the period covered by the report, a former Member of Parliament (M.P.) and 13 alleged Mungiki were in detention on charges that they murdered 10 persons in January 2003. The killings allegedly occurred after the M.P. hired Mungiki to instigate violence after his re-election defeat in the December 2002 general elections. In addition, 40 Mungiki were also awaiting trial for the alleged killing of a matatu (minibus taxi) driver in 2002.

Practicing witchcraft is a criminal offense under colonial-era laws; 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 for which the causes were unknown. 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.

In May 2004, police arrested a Nigerian pastor, a prominent doctor, and six other members of Winners Chapel International in the Western Province town of Kitale and charged them with torturing a church member. Local newspapers alleged that the man was tortured to force him to give up his child as a human sacrifice. The Nigerian-based religion, which has 10 churches in the country, has denied the allegations.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although the Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, in the past, the Government has used sections of the Public Order Act and the Penal Code to restrict or disrupt public meetings that religious groups organized or participated in, primarily for political reasons. During the period covered by this report, however, there were no reports that the Government restricted public meetings organized by religious groups.

Prominent Muslims in the country continue to charge the Government with arbitrarily harassing Muslims in the name of the war on terrorism. In May 2004, a Somali-Kenyan M.P. wrote a letter to a leading newspaper citing several cases of what he alleged were arbitrary arrests and deportation of Muslims. The M.P. also said that the Government is deliberately attempting to keep Muslims out of the country on the instructions of certain foreign embassies who are "enemies of Muslims" and who have no "regard for the lives of other human beings except those of their own (citizens)."

In March 2002, government authorities charged Wanjiru Nduhiu, the leader of an unregistered Kikuyu group, with urging her followers to renounce Christianity and revert to traditional beliefs and practices, such as female genital mutilation. Nduhiu denied the charges and 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. Intermarriage between members of Christian denominations is common, and interfaith prayer services occur frequently. Intermarriage between Muslims and Christians, although less frequent, also is socially acceptable, and mosques and Christian churches are 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.

In June 2003, Muslims in Bura Division of Tana River District reportedly burned down five churches after an Islamic preacher was arrested and briefly interrogated by police. The Muslims were followers of the cleric and were reportedly angered by the arrest. The cleric had converted to Islam from Christianity and had reportedly angered the Christians in the area with his teachings against Christianity; he was released from police custody at the request of a Member of Parliament. The churches that were burned down were the Anglican Church of Kenya in Bura, the Pentecostal Evangelism Fellowship of Africa (PEFA), the East African Pentecostal Church, the Full Gospel Church of Kenya, and the Bethel Church. Reverend Simon Mgumba of PEFA said his congregation was diminishing after the incident, due to fears of additional attacks. Reconciliation efforts between the communities are underway and no further church burnings occurred during the period covered by this report.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of Muslim youths or demonstrators burning down churches.

There were several disputes over land ownership and institutional conflicts between rival religious factions during the period covered by this report; some resulted in violence.

In March 2003, Joseph Okech was killed in a fight during Sunday services between two factions of St. Stephen's Church in Dandora, Nairobi. The conflict reportedly was the result of a leadership struggle. However, church leaders contend that non-church members were actually responsible for the incident, which remained under investigation during the period covered by this report.

In May 2003, rival factions of the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa in Nyeri clashed violently and several worshippers were injured. The two factions are aligned to two feuding archbishops.

In December 2002, eight persons were arrested in connection with the invasion of the African Independent Pentecostal Church during services. Three worshippers and the bishop were injured during the attack and property was damaged. The invasion was suspected to have resulted from an internal church conflict that was sparked when the previous bishop was ordered to retire by church headquarters.

Unlike in previous years, members of the Othaya Presbyterian Church and the Pentecostal Assemblies of God were not forcibly dispersed during services.

In January 2002, Egerton University officials barred approximately 300 worshippers from the AIC from conducting services in the Lord Egerton Castle, which has been the subject of a longstanding property dispute between the University and the AIC. According to the AIC, former President Moi allocated the castle and the 50 adjacent acres to the Church in 1995; according to records at the Ministry of Lands, the property belongs to the chaplain of the University and 2 other individuals. Former President Moi issued a statement soon after the January 2002 incident indicating that the castle and surrounding property belonged to the University; however, AIC leaders urged their followers to ignore the statement. The dispute was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

No actions have been taken against youths involved in the forcible dispersion of persons from a church in Nairobi in March 2002.

In April, 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. Unlike similar cases in past years, no one alleged that either of these incidents was politically motivated.

Upon the request of several Christian organizations, the government of former President Moi appointed a commission to investigate the Freemasons and any other organizations that might be practicing devil worshiping. In January, the Anglican Church in Nairobi refused to preside over the funeral of a Member of Parliament, who was also an Assistant Minister, because the M.P. was said to be a grand master of the Freemasons Society. However, when the funeral moved to the M.P.'s hometown in Nyanza Province, the local Anglican bishops, together with Catholic and Evangelical Protestant clergy, presided over the funeral. Unlike their counterparts in Nairobi, the Nyanza clergy were all members of the same ethnic group, Luo, as the deceased M.P.

In April, a High Court Registrar postponed an inquiry into the death of Father John Anthony Kaiser, a Catholic priest working in the country for more than 30 years. Kaiser was found dead of gunshot wounds near Naivasha town in August 2000. Father Kaiser was a vocal human rights activist and a critic of key members of the Government. Although there was much public speculation to the contrary, an investigative report released by a foreign government in 2001 concluded that the evidence was most consistent with suicide, and that it was unlikely that Father Kaiser had been murdered. The Catholic Church disputed this report and called for further independent investigation. The newly elected Government, under pressure from the Catholic Church, agreed in April 2003 to hold an inquest into Kaiser's death. The High Court Registrar suspended the inquiry after the presiding magistrate was retired amid corruption allegations. The inquiry resumed in June 2004 and was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. The Catholic Church has also called for fresh investigations into the deaths of other Catholic priests who it believes died under suspicious circumstances during the previous government's term.

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.

In the first 6 months of 2004, youth groups in Coast Province threatened to strip women they perceived as wearing westernized clothing that was "too revealing." However, the Minister of Tourism made it clear that these threats were unacceptable and any such acts would meet with arrest. No such acts were reported.

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 National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), the AIC, the PCEA, and the Hindu Council. The NCCK generally is involved in a variety of civil society initiatives, including conflict resolution. The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, the MCC, and the NCCK launched a pilot program in 2002 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, formed in April 2003.

In April 2003, the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) withdrew from the Ufungamano Initiative, an interfaith movement that helped spur the constitutional review process. SUPKEM left Ufungamano after some Christian members of the group 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 regularly hosts meetings with religious leaders to discuss issues affecting their communities. The Ambassador and Embassy officials routinely travel through-

out the country to meet with various religious and community leaders in an effort to facilitate dialogue on religious freedom.

U.S. Government agencies also provide assistance to many communities that, for historical and religious reasons, perceive themselves to have been marginalized by previous Governments. This assistance takes the form of grants by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Ambassador's Self-Help Fund, and the Embassy's Democracy and Human Rights Fund. The U.S. military also carries out civic action programs to provide medical and veterinary assistance as well as to build and repair schools in marginalized communities. The U.S. Peace Corps also provides volunteers to many of these 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 a total area of 11,720 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.2 million.

Christianity is the dominant religion. Approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian, of which 70 percent is Roman Catholic and 20 percent is Lesotho Evangelical, Anglican, and other Christian denominations. Muslims, Hindus, 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 northeastern part of the country. Most practitioners of Islam are of Asian origin, while the majority of Christians are the indigenous Basotho. Many devout 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 local and traditional way of singing (a repetitive call and response style) in Sesotho—the indigenous language—as well as English. Priests dress in traditional local attire during services.

Missionaries active in the country are evangelical, traditional Protestant, and Catholic groups from North America, Europe, and South Africa.

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 holidays that are also national holidays: Christmas; Good Friday; Easter Monday; and Ascension Day. The observance of these holidays does not negatively affect any religious group.

The Government does not establish requirements for religious recognition. Generally the Government does not provide benefits to any 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 of 1966, 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 recognized as official for any government benefits, such as duty-free import permits for donated items or tax relief on donated funds. There are no punishments for not registering, and it is common for informal church groups not to register.

The strong Catholic presence in the country led to the establishment of Catholic schools in the last century and their influence over education policy. However, the

influence of the Catholic Church has decreased in recent years, and the Catholic Church now owns less than 40 percent of all primary and secondary schools in the country. The Ministry of Education paid and certified all teachers, and required a standard curriculum for both secular and parochial schools.

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. There generally was mutual understanding and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. There were efforts within the ecumenical community to promote tolerance and cooperation on social issues. Although there were some tensions between Christians and Muslims in the past, there were no reports of such tensions 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.

The U.S. Embassy and religious leaders of the country discuss their roles in the fight against HIV/AIDS and in maintaining political peace and 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 first few months of the reporting period.

Respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. The administration of former President Charles Taylor tolerated some religious tensions between Christians and Muslims. However, once the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) took office in October 2003, there were no reports of discrimination against Muslims or Islamic leaders. Unlike in the past, there were no prisoners of conscience.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Inter-religious interaction increased considerably; however, there was some tension between the major religious communities. In rural areas, specifically in Lofa County, there was tension between certain communities as a result of population movements during the war. Specifically, there was tension between ethnic Mandingos, who are predominantly Muslim, and ethnic Lormas, Kisii, and Gbandi, who are a mix of Christian, Muslim, 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 a total area of 43,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at 3.3 million. As much as 40 percent of the population practices either Christianity or elements of both Christianity and traditional indigenous religions. Approximately 40 percent practices traditional indigenous religions exclusively. Approximately 20 percent of the population practices Islam, which continued to gain adherents. There is a small percentage of atheists and Baha'i.

The Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), and AME Zion denominations, as well as Pentecostal churches are represented in the Christian community. Some of the Pen-

tecostal movements are affiliated with churches outside the country, while others are independent.

The country's Muslim population comes mainly from the Mandingo ethnic group, who occupy the northern counties, and the Vai ethnic group, who are found predominantly in the western part of the country. Ethnic groups in the central, eastern, and southern parts of the country participate in the traditional religious practices of the Poro and Sande secret societies. Christians live throughout the country.

Foreign missionary groups in the country include Baptists, Catholics, 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. Since taking office, the NTGL at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Unlike the Taylor Government, the NTGL did not harass, marginalize, or attempt to intimidate the Muslim population. The NTGL encouraged religious freedom.

There is no state religion. However, government ceremonies invariably open and close with prayer and may include the singing of hymns. The prayers and hymns are usually Christian, but are occasionally Islamic.

In the past, former President Charles Taylor divided the National Muslim Council of Liberia by seeding the Council with his loyalists. To undermine the independence of the Council, former President Taylor sponsored the expulsion of Sheik Kafumba Konneh as Chairman and appointed one of his loyalists within the country's Islamic community, Alhaji Jakaity Taylor, to the position. After Alhaji Jakaity Taylor's death in April 2002, Alhaji Ibrahim Sheriff, was selected with the approval of Taylor to fill the chairman position. The National Muslim Council remained divided into two rival councils during the period covered by this report. Konneh formed a separate council that gained more-widespread recognition and support among the population after former President Taylor's departure. Before being expelled from his position with the National Muslim Council, Sheik Kafumba Konneh had become vice president of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRC), a well-known organization led by Archbishop Michael Kpakala Francis that has tried to coordinate peace efforts between the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) rebels, and the ex-government/pro-Taylor forces. Konneh remained vice president of IRC during the period covered by this report.

In 2004, the NTGL did not sponsor a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, but Muslim adherents independently made the pilgrimage.

Major Christian holidays, including Fast and Prayer Day, Easter, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day, are observed as national holidays while Islamic holy days, such as Eid Fatr, are not celebrated as national holidays. The NTGL mandates that public businesses and markets, including Muslim businesses and shops, remain closed on Sundays and Christian holidays. Muslim leaders complained about the policy and have taken the issue to the National Transitional Legislative Assembly. There is no legal obligation to excuse Muslims from employment or classes for Friday prayers. Some employers, at their discretion, excuse Muslim employees for Friday prayers.

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

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; however, minority faiths are not taught in public schools. Parents are allowed to 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 supports societal efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Specifically, the NTGL urged the IRC to continue its efforts to encourage inter-religious dialogue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Although the law prohibits religious discrimination, Islamic leaders complained of government discrimination against Muslims. Although there are some Muslims in senior government positions, many Muslims believed they were bypassed for desirable jobs.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there was no ban on street corner evangelism or preaching during the period covered by this report.

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

The Government responded positively to requests for the restitution of religious properties. In the past, former President Taylor's militia confiscated the properties of ethnic Mandingo Muslims for their alleged involvement or sympathy with LURD. Since Taylor's departure from the country, most properties seized by his loyalists either have been abandoned or returned to their owners. All religions had equal opportunity to regain control over former property of religious organizations, in particular those used to hold religious services.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the regime of former President Taylor, dozens of Muslim citizens were jailed because they were perceived to be sympathizers of the nominally Muslim-dominated LURD rebel group. They were all released before President Taylor's departure from office. Under the NTGL there were no arrests based on religion or ethnicity. There were no state executions of any person based on his or her religion; it is presumed that in the past Taylor's forces killed some of the ethnic Mandigo Muslims who had been arrested on suspicion of being LURD collaborators.

The threats and burglaries against members of the Catholic Church's Peace and Justice Commission stopped following the departure of Charles Taylor.

Unlike in the past, there were no reports that persons were detained without charge or placed under house arrest based on their religious beliefs or practices. Under former President Taylor, some Muslims were arrested on suspicion of collaborating with, or sympathy with, LURD; however, it was unclear whether they were targeted specifically because of their religion.

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.

During the conflict between the Taylor Government and LURD forces, pro-government militias suspected Mandingo Muslim youths of being sympathetic to the LURD cause and harassed, imprisoned, and tortured them. Also during the conflict, LURD forces reportedly destroyed churches in some areas that they captured from government troops. For example, in early 2003, during fighting between government troops and LURD rebel forces in the town of Ganta, rebel forces systematically burned down churches and destroyed church related buildings. When government troops later regained control of the town, they systematically destroyed mosques and homes that had belonged to ethnic Mandingo Muslims, who made up the bulk of LURD fighters.

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 citizen 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 IRC, comprised of both Christians and Muslims, promotes dialogue between various religious communities. The relationship between Christians and Muslims has so far been cordial and peaceful. However, in the countryside, there was some tension between communities that had fought on opposite sides during the war between Charles Taylor's government and LURD; these tensions appeared to be related more to ethnic and clan conflicts than religious differences.

The country's civil war had a religious undertone in that the LURD rebels were mostly Mandingo Muslims while government troops were mostly animists and Christians. Ethnic tensions persisted in Lofa County between the predominantly

Muslim Mandingo ethnic group and the Lorma ethnic group in which there are both Christians and animists.

Ritual killings, in which body parts used in traditional indigenous rituals are removed from the victim, continued to occur. Little reliable information is readily available about traditional religions associated with ritual killings. The number of such killings was difficult to ascertain since police often describe deaths as accidents even when body parts were removed. Deaths that appeared to be natural or accidental sometimes were rumored to be the work of ritual killers. It is believed that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn ethnic groups, which are concentrated in the southeastern counties, most commonly engage in ritual killings. Body parts of a member the group believed to be powerful were considered the most effective for the purposes of the rituals. The body parts most frequently removed included the heart, liver, and genitals. In some cases, the rituals reportedly involved eating body parts. Some traditional religious beliefs hold that human body parts, when consumed, grant special powers to the person who eats them. Fighters on all sides of the conflict (LURD, MODEL and the ex-Government/pro-Taylor forces) were reported to have engaged in such practices at times. During the civil war, faction leaders sometimes ate (and one faction leader had himself filmed eating) body parts of leaders of rival factions. Ritual killings for the purpose of obtaining body parts traditionally were committed by religious group members called "heart men"; however, since the civil war, criminals inured to killing also may sell body parts.

Incidents of ritualistic killings increased during the reporting period due to the breakdown of law and order in rural counties, including Maryland County. During the first 3 months of 2004, there was an increase in the number of mysterious deaths in and around Monrovia and residents blamed such deaths on ritualistic killers but no evidences was found to support their claim.

The private sector in urban areas, particularly in the capital, gave preference to Christianity in civic ceremonies and observances. Many public meetings generally began with a Christian prayer; however, Muslims were not prohibited from also saying a prayer. The IRC brings together leaders of Christian, Islamic, and other faiths to promote inter-religious dialogue.

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 a total area of 228,880 square miles, and its population is approximately 16.5 million. Although precise official figures are unavailable, approximately half of the population belongs to one of the country's four Christian denominations. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination, followed by the Reformed Protestant Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). President Ravalomanana is a lay vice president of FJKM. 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 northwestern portion of the island. Aboriginal and ethnic Indians 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.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely in the country, including Catholics, Protestants of various denominations, the 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, operate freely 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.

The law strongly recommends, but does not require, religious organizations to register with the Ministry of Interior. Registration provides a religious organization with the legal status necessary for receipt of direct bequests and other gifts. There are no penalties for failure to register.

The Malagasy Council of Christian Churches (FFKM) is the umbrella organization for the country's four principal Christian denominations. Composed of the Roman Catholic, FJKM, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches, the FFKM is a key player on a broad range of issues. The FFKM is a traditional leader in education, and recently its role has expanded to include activities such as coordinating a national campaign against HIV/AIDS and election monitoring. In the political arena, the FFKM has been a mediator, bringing together antagonistic factions, but it has occasionally taken an overtly political position. Most recently, during the 2001 presidential campaign and the ensuing political crisis, it supported the then-mayor of Antananarivo, Marc Ravalomanana, in his ultimately successful bid to be president. President Ravalomanana's position as a lay Vice President of FJKM still generates some political criticism alleging church and state interests are not kept entirely separate. Nevertheless, the FFKM remains an active force on social and political issues.

Restrictions on Religious Freedoms

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

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 on the grounds that such access constitutes a public service. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of any religious organizations that were denied free access to state-run media.

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 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 is derived from the relative economic prosperity of the Karana and not based on their religious affiliation. During the period covered by this report, President Ravalomanana continued to meet with Karana and Muslim leaders to discuss economic and citizenship 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's September 2003 Human Rights Working Group session, devoted entirely to the country's Muslim community, stimulated discussion and increased mutual understanding between

Muslim and non-Muslims. Representatives of various elements of the Muslim community made presentations on their beliefs and on the role and social context of Islam in the country. This session allowed a group traditionally on the outskirts of society to voice its desire for fuller acceptance into society.

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 a total area of 45,747 square miles, and its population is approximately 12 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, ascribing to either the Qadriya or Sukkutu groups. There are also Hindus, Baha'is, 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.

The concentration of faiths in certain regions of the country has sometimes been reflected in regional voting trends.

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. Religious groups must submit documentation detailing the structure and mission of their 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. There were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups.

The Government observes both Christian and Muslim holidays. Public holidays in the country include Eid-El 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 pay lower fees for employment permits than do other professionals.

In May Bingu wa Mutharika, a Catholic, was elected President. The new vice president is Muslim. Both were strongly supported by the former president, Bakili Muluzi, who is Muslim.

Former president Muluzi had regular meetings with all religious groups, and President Bingu wa Mutharika has indicated he intends to do the same.

Some Christian politicians and clerics have raised Islam as a political issue, citing the Islamic faith of former president Muluzi and of the new Vice President Cassim Chilumpha. The same few opposition leaders have cited the Government's friendliness with Islamic countries, along with the building of new mosques, as their justification for accusations against the ruling party.

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, Bahai, and Christian material.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In January 2002, the Office of the Ombudsman directed the Ministry of Agriculture to pay benefits and salary arrears to a self-exiled member of Jehovah's Witnesses who fled the country in 1977 to escape religious persecution under then-President Hastings Banda. The ombudsman cited a 1999 notice issued by the Office of the President and Cabinet that directed the Government to reimburse all persons dismissed from office on religious grounds during the Banda era. According to an officer in the Ministry of Agriculture, all former exiles with documentation to prove their status were reimbursed.

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 tensions between Christians and Muslims during the period covered by this report. Although there were no significant conflicts, these minor tensions were especially evident during the presidential and parliamentary campaign period in April and May, and they seem to have been largely fueled by political candidates. Christians and Muslims generally coexisted peacefully, often participating in business or civil-service organizations together.

During the presidential and parliamentary campaign period, some prominent Christian religious leaders frequently spoke about corruption, the electoral process, and the candidates. The churches' remarks were often openly critical of the ruling political party. While candidates and officials took issue with the churches' statements, the Government did not make attempts to silence religious leaders, other than declaring 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.

On December 19, a group of Muslims in Blantyre allegedly beat a Christian preacher for refusing to hand over a copy of the Koran. The preacher did not suffer serious injuries. No arrests were reported.

In June 2003, Muslims rioted in Blantyre and Mangochi following the Government's arrest and reported deportation of five alleged Al-Qaeda members. On June 27, rioters vandalized property at the offices of the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM) Secretariat in Blantyre. They blamed the leaders of the organization for failing to ensure that the suspects received a trial. In Mangochi rioters damaged vehicles, including one belonging to Father Lazarus Girevulo of the Catholic Church, five Christian churches, and the offices of a U.S. nongovernmental organization, Save the Children. On June 28, police arrested many of the key instigators of the riots, but tensions remained high in the major cities. Those arrested have not yet gone to trial, although the cases have been 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. The Government roundly condemned the violence and delivered a strong public message that religious groups should remain peaceful and tolerant of one another.

In February 2002, MAM and a Christian missionary group sought government intervention to resolve complaints regarding each other's behavior. Christians were accused of trying to convert Muslims in the mosques, and Muslims were rumored to be planning to harm members of the Christian group; however, no violence was reported.

In May during the parliamentary and presidential campaign period, Radio Islam was accused of permitting callers and guests to make inflammatory or intolerant on-air remarks concerning other religions, but no formal complaint was filed. In September 2002, the Catholic Church of Malawi filed a complaint against Radio Islam with the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) for broadcasting insulting statements about Christians. However, MACRA reviewed the case and attributed no fault to Radio Islam. In December 2002, four members of the Seventh-

day Adventist Apostolic Church were arrested by the Blantyre police and subsequently convicted on charges of breaching the peace for their role in inciting a violent clash with Muslims. No further action was taken on this case during the reporting period.

In March 2002, six Catholic bishops released a pastoral letter protesting a constitutional amendment that would eliminate presidential term limits. Although the letter ignited a heated political debate in the press, there was no reaction from the Government. The constitutional amendment was not passed.

There have been active efforts to foster cooperation between religious groups. For example, during the year, 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 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 sponsored a speaker on Islam in the U.S. and continued to promote religious tolerance through grants, meetings, and the distribution of reading materials. In October 2003, the Ambassador was interviewed and took calls from the public on a Radio Islam program.

In 2003 the Embassy's Democracy and Human Rights Fund sponsored a Christian group's efforts to increase rural access to various services, especially those promoting education of girls and victims counseling.

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 a land area of 474,764 square miles, and its population is approximately 11.5 million. Muslims make up an estimated 90 percent of the population, and 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. Most of the remainder 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.

Religious groups are not geographically concentrated or segregated. Christian communities tend to be located in and around urban areas, generally in the southern regions of the country. 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 the slaves of the Tuareg nobles, and also among unemployed youth. The interest these groups have in Dawa is based on a desire to dissociate themselves from their former masters, and for the youth, to find a source of income. The Dawa sect has a strong influence in Kidal, while the Wahabi movement has been growing in Timbuktu. The country's traditional approach to Islam is peaceful and moderate, as reflected in the ancient manuscripts from the former University of Timbuktu.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country; the most numerous are Christian groups that are based in Europe and are engaged 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 in the country without government interference, and they do not link the benefits of their development activities to conversion. Muslims and non-Muslims may proselytize freely.

Family law, including laws pertaining to divorce, marriage, and inheritance, are 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 he concludes defame another religion; however, there were no reports of instances in which publications were prohibited 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 a variety of faiths may be found within the same family. Many followers of one religion attend religious ceremonies of other religions, especially weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

Non-Muslim missionary communities live and work in the country without difficulty. Christian missionaries, particularly the rural-based development workers, have good relations with their communities.

Islam as practiced in the country is tolerant and adapted to local conditions. Women participate in economic and political activity, engage in social interaction, and generally do not wear veils.

In August 2003, there was a conflict in the village of Yerere when traditional Sunni practitioners attacked Wahhabi Sunnis, who were building an authorized mosque. Nine persons were killed and two were seriously wounded. The case is currently under investigation.

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 is being prosecuted.

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 in ministries who deal with these issues.

During the period covered by this report, Embassy officials expanded dialogue with Muslim groups to promote mutual understanding and to encourage continued secularism of the Government. In January and June, the Embassy sponsored two workshops through its Democracy and Human Rights Fund focused on the Islamic community. The first was a workshop on the "Role of Tolerance and Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution in Malian Society," and the second, entitled "Role of Young Muslims in Conflict Resolution," targeted youth. Embassy officials have also engaged Muslim groups through other events, such as an Iftaar dinner hosted at the American Cultural Center and several similar events.

The Embassy's Public Affairs office concentrated on the Muslim community through speakers and musicians.

The U.S. Embassy maintains contact with the foreign missionary community and monitors any governmental or societal threat to religious freedom.

MAURITANIA

The Constitution establishes the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the religion of its citizens and the State.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. 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 the few non-Muslim citizens practice their religions openly and freely.

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 419,212 square miles, and its population is approximately 3 million. Virtually 100 percent of the 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.

There are several foreign faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) active in humanitarian and developmental work in the country. Although there are no synagogues, a very small number of expatriates practice Judaism.

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 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. A 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 city of Nouakchott, mosques and Koranic 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 holidays 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 holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Shari'a, proclaimed the law of the land under a previous government in 1983, includes the Koranic 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.

Although there is no specific legal prohibition against proselytizing by non-Muslims, in practice the Government prohibits proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims through the use of Article 11 of the Press Act. The Act bans the publication of any material that is against Islam or contradicts or otherwise threatens Islamic principles. In May 2003, the Government banned Arab-language newspaper Al-Raya, noted for its Islamic activist leanings, under the provisions of this law. 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.

In June 2003, the Government passed a law prohibiting the use of mosques for any form of political activity, including the distribution of propaganda and incitement of violence. In March, the Government used this law to forbid a Salafist imam, Imam Dedew, from preaching anywhere but in his home mosque. He continued to preach from his home mosque without persecution, but on several occasions during the reporting period, he was prevented from preaching in other locations.

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 Koranic 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 Koran. Although attendance of 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 religious classes make up a disproportionately small percentage of the overall academic grade, these students are able to advance in school and graduate with diplomas, provided they compensate for their failure to attend the required religion classes by their performance in other classes.

Following the May 2003 crackdown on Islamic activists, the Government closed a number of Saudi- and Gulf-funded Islamic schools and charities. These organizations remained shut at the end of the period covered by this report. The Government also closed an Islamic charity association in late April for its alleged connections to local Islamic activists. ISERI, the government-funded and -supported Institute for Islamic Science, Studies, and Research, remained open and fully funded.

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.

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 were no reported incidents of inter-religious violence during this period. Several public protests against the Government's recognition of Israel made negative references to Jewish persons as part of the Israeli state. Anti-Israeli graffiti also made negative references to Jewish persons in this context.

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 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. Government sponsored visitors to give lectures to ISERI faculty and students during this period. In March, an American scholar of Islam discussed his conversion to Islam and his deep interest in Sufism. In April, an American academic discussed Western concepts of the separation of church and state.

The Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) actively engaged prominent religious leaders in a dialogue to broaden mutual understanding of religious principles and freedom in an Islamic republic. The Ambassador and DCM have also discussed issues of religious freedom with representatives of American faith-based NGOs working in country.

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, Creole, and Muslim minorities persist; however, members of each group worshipped without hindrance.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 718 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.2 million. In the 2000 census, approximately 50 percent of the population claimed to be Hindu, 32 percent Christian, and 16 percent Muslim. Less than 1 percent claimed to be Buddhist, atheist, agnostic, or of another faith. There are no figures for those who 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 also are practicing Catholics, since many citizens of Chinese ancestry have sent, and continue to 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 intermarriage is increasing. An individual's name easily 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. Citizens of Chinese ancestry usually practice both Buddhism and Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent usually are Catholic. Although there is concern among Hindu organizations that evangelical Christian

churches are converting Hindus to Christianity, the 1990 and 2000 censuses show that the proportions of membership in the various faiths have remained the same during the last 10 years.

There are foreign missionary groups active in the country, 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 in the country 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 7 members) are registered by the Registrar of Associations and are recognized as legal entities with tax-free 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 detailing the conditions of 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 all matters pertaining to the 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. During the period covered by this report, the Government reportedly turned down a petition to increase the number of permits for Mormon missionaries.

National holidays are representative of the country's multi-religious, multiethnic population. Hindu (Maha Shivratree, Ganesh Chathurthi, and Divali), Tamil (Thaipoosam Cavadee, and Ougadi), Christian (Christmas and All Saints Day), and Muslim (Eud-Ul-Fitr) religious holy days are national holidays. There was no evidence that the observance of these holidays negatively affected any religious group.

The Ministry of Arts and Culture is responsible for promoting cultural interaction among different cultural components within the country, and in the past year ran daylong events aimed at fostering cultural (and therefore religious) understanding. The Ministry held daylong activities for Divali and Eid-Ul-Fitr in the past year.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. While for political reasons in the past it 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 citizens with a Hindu background in the upper echelons of the civil service, some minorities, usually Creoles and Muslims, allege that a glass ceiling exists that prevents them from reaching the highest levels in the civil service. 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. Berenger is the first Christian Prime Minister of the country.

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 both the Creoles' position as the country's underclass as well as ethnic differences, since the police force predominantly is Indo-Mauritian. 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 5 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

At least one nongovernmental organization is engaged in programs to facilitate better understanding between religious groups. This organization has produced booklets for children explaining characteristics of the country's main religions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Tensions between the Hindu majority and Christian, Creole, 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 charged with oversight over the country's nongovernment schools) oversees the schools. With the government's agreement, 50 percent of the available seats in these schools were allocated to pupils according to the certificate of primary education results, and, therefore, based on merit. The remaining 50 percent were administered by the Catholic Church and therefore given to Catholic students. The President of the Hindu Teacher's Union, Suttyhudeo 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, the Supreme Court decided in April in favor of Tengur's claims that religious beliefs should not be taken into account when pupils are admitted to these Catholic Schools. The matter of how students will be selected for these schools in the future remained undecided at the end of the period covered by this report.

In December 2003, Cehl Meeah, the leader of the local chapter of Hezbullah, was cleared of all charges related to the 1996 killing of three rival Muslim political activists. The Director of Public Prosecutions decided there was not enough evidence to sustain charges against Meeah, and he was released.

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.

MOZAMBIQUE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 a total area of 308,642 square miles, and its population is approximately 18 million. According to the National Institute of Statistics, half of the population does not profess to practice a religion or creed; however, scholars at local universities assert that virtually all 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 and the coastal strip are most strongly Muslim, Catholics predominate in the central provinces, and Protestants are most numerous in the southern region. Government sources note that evangelical Christians represent the fastest growing religious group, with the number of young adherents under the age of 35 increasing rapidly.

There are over 500 distinct religious denominations and 107 religious organizations registered with the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice (see Section II). Among Muslims only a generic "Islamic" community (Sunni) and the Ismaili community (of non-Indian origin) are registered. Among Christians the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Greek Orthodox Churches are registered along with Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Seventh-day Adventist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Nazarene, and Jehovah's Witnesses groups, as well as many other evangelical, apostolic, and Pentecostal churches. The Zion Christian Church, the largest of the African Independent Churches in the country, also has a large number of adherents. Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i communities are registered and constitute small minorities. Religious communities tend to draw members from across ethnic, political, economic, and racial lines.

Traditional indigenous practices and rituals are present in most Christian churches, including Catholic churches, and in most Muslim worship. For example, members of these faiths commonly travel to the graves of ancestors to say special prayers for rain. Similarly, 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 pouring 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 and evangelical groups operate freely in the country, representing numerous Protestant denominations, as well as the Summer Institute of Languages Bible Translators and the Tabligh Islamic Call Mission. Muslim missionaries from South Africa have established Islamic schools ("madrassas") in many cities and towns of the northern provinces and provide scholarships for students from the south to study in South Africa.

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 religious aims freely. 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 funds, 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. As is the case for all foreigners residing in the country, missionaries face a somewhat burdensome process in gaining legal residency; however, they conduct activities without government interference throughout the country.

The Constitution gives religious groups the right to own and acquire assets, and these institutions are allowed by law to own and operate schools. There are increasing numbers of religious schools in operation. The Islamic community constructed a primary and secondary school for 1,000 students in Maputo and has established a small college in Nampula; the primary school began operating in 2003 and the secondary school in 2002. A Sudanese organization registered with the Ministry of Education provides funding for two secondary schools in Nampula and Gaza. The Kuwaiti-based Africa Muslim Agency finished construction of a new facility in Maputo for administration and for the accommodation of students receiving scholar-

ships to study abroad. It also financed several Islamic schools in Nampula Province. The Catholic University has educational facilities in Beira, Nampula, and Cuamba, and has opened a new facility in Pemba. Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited strictly.

A conference of bishops, including Catholic and Anglican members, meets regularly and consults with the President. 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 by the press without restriction.

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 religious principles, advocated behavior based on Muslim principles, and criticized the government for corruption. The Government thus far has tolerated PIMO's activities, and PIMO remained a minor political party. PIMO won three seats in the November 2003 municipal elections, all in predominantly Muslim municipalities in the northern part of the country. Since its inception, PIMO has not yet been able to achieve the 5 percent of national votes required to obtain a seat in the National Assembly.

Most places of worship nationalized by the Government have been returned to the respective religious organizations; however, the Catholic Church and certain Muslim communities claimed that some other properties such as schools, health centers, and residences unjustly remain in state hands and continued to request their return. The Directorate for Religious Affairs is mandated by the Council of Ministers to address the issue of the return 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 the need to construct new facilities, particularly schools and health clinics. Provincial governments have the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restoration. The Papal Nunciatura indicated that properties are generally returned in poor condition, due to the lack of government resources.

The Islamic community completed construction of a Grand Mosque in downtown Maputo in early 2003, although the Government previously had refused to grant permission for new mosques to be built in the center of major cities. The mosque was formally inaugurated later in the year, and religious services are now being held there. The Hindu temple in Maputo, which was inaugurated in May 2002, was the country's first official Hindu temple in 80 years.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

A Brazilian missionary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Doraci Edinger, was murdered in the province of Nampula in February. There is no evidence that the murder was based on the missionary's religious affiliation.

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 were amicable, especially at the grassroots level. The black and Indian Islamic communities tended to remain separate; however, there were no reports of conflict, and, furthermore, the mostly Indian Muslim communities have also provided financial assistance to the poorer, black Islamic mosques.

The 6-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, serves as an example of interfaith cooperation. The goal of the forum is to offer collective assistance to the needy, without regard to creed. During the floods of 2000 and 2001, numerous

religious communities jointly contributed to flood relief efforts. They officially established themselves as an organization in March 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 played a leading role in brokering the 1992 Rome Peace Accords between the FRELIMO Government and RENAMO opposition party coalition. Since that time, it has continued to encourage the evolution of the political system.

Two prominent Christian figures, Reverend Jamisse Taimo and Reverend Arao Litsuri, chaired the last two National Elections Commissions, in 1999 and 2003. The Vice President of the Mozambican Islamic Council is a member of Agenda 2025, the Government's national development strategy.

On December 9, 2003, the National Assembly passed a new Family Law, which would replace the colonial-era Civic Code and bring the law into line with equality provisions in the Constitution. However, the law was returned to the National Assembly for revisions due to apparent incompatibilities with Constitutional provisions covering marriage. The new law, if accepted, would raise the marriage age to 18 for both sexes, eliminate husbands' de facto status as heads of families, and legalize civil, religious, and common law unions. The law would end legal recognition of polygynous marriages and make them illegal, although women in polygynous marriages currently are granted full marital and inheritance rights.

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 (NGOs), Catholic bishops, the Papal Nunciatura, and numerous U.S. missionaries.

Relations were strengthened with the Mussa Bin Bique University in Nampula, where an "American Corner" was inaugurated in 2002. The American Corner provides the general public with access to information about the United States through book collections and other media, and local programming. In October 2003, the Ambassador hosted a luncheon with Muslim community leaders. In May the Embassy supported a weeklong workshop on capacity building for HIV/AIDS activists affiliated with local churches. The workshop brought together 30 activists from churches in the Maputo region and included officials from the Ministry of Health and an activist from a local NGO. Sessions included remarks by the Ambassador and a videotape on HIV/AIDS.

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 a total area of 320,827 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.8 million. A vast majority of citizens—more than 90 percent—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. 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 pre-

dominantly are immigrants, descendents of immigrants, or converted after recent proselytizing. 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 recognize any religion formally. However, government officials publicly emphasized the role of three denominations—Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic—in mobilizing political support during the country's struggle for independence, and occasionally expressed distrust of other religious groups.

There are no registration requirements for religious organizations.

The Government recognizes 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.

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 members have frequent contact with citizens and foreign visitors from a wide variety of religious faiths. The U.S. Embassy continues to support activities that encourage religious tolerance and respect for human rights through the Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF).

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.

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 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 practicing communities of Christians and Baha'i. Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, account for less

than 5 percent of the population but are active particularly in the region 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 in the country.

Active Christian missionary organizations include Southern Baptists, Evangelical Baptists, Catholics, Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventists, Serving 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 generally was broadcast only 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 Department, 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 conducted in French and Arabic. The government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

Christmas, Easter Monday, and Muslim holy days 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; however, in the fall of 2001, the Government banned two Islamic organizations because they sent threatening letters to a foreign embassy. Despite the ban in 2002, the same organizations issued a tract calling for a jihad in which they denounced the secular state and advocated Shari'a law. The Government reaffirmed the ban and warned those who signed the tract to stop such actions. Later, in 2002, the Government arrested the leaders of both organizations and charged them with incitement to revolt. They were released in 2003, but their organizations remained banned at the end of 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. In Spring 2004, during a regional polio vaccination campaign sponsored by the United Nations, seven Muslim preachers urged violent resistance to the campaign, claiming it was a plot by Westerners to sterilize Muslim children. In reaction, the Government temporarily detained the preachers on the grounds of inciting a riot. Nigerian Islamic associations and President Tandja publicly supported the campaign.

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 are also required to take religious oaths on a holy book of their own choosing.

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 have been reports in the past of isolated instances where individual Muslims were not tolerant of the rights of members of minority religions to practice their faith; however, there were no reported cases of intolerance toward non-Islamic communities or religions during this reporting period.

In March 2003, Islamic organizations in Niamey held a rally to protest the war in Iraq and expressed solidarity with Iraqi citizens. No violence was reported.

In Spring 2004, Muslim preachers verbally protested a polio vaccination campaign, and the government intervened to limit their effect (see Section II).

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 the U.S. Embassy's continued outreach to the Muslim community, the U.S. Government funded an important cultural preservation project by supplying equipment and training to electronically preserve thousands of revered Islamic texts. The U.S. Government also funded a renowned American religious scholar to tour the country and lead discussions on Islam in America, prompting in-depth discussions and promoting a deeper appreciation of American society.

The U.S. Embassy hosted a series of Iftaar dinners during Ramadan, met with traditional Muslim leaders in Kiota and with Islamic leaders at the Islamic University in Say, enhanced existing relationships with Islamic journalists, and presented programs at French/Arabic bilingual schools. In March 2003, Embassy officials met with key Muslim leaders regarding the U.S. military operations in Iraq, in an effort to lessen any potential anti-Christian or anti-Western reactions.

The U.S. Embassy maintains good relationships with Protestant religious groups, most of which are long-term resident missionaries and well-known members of the American community. Embassy officials also have contact with the Catholic mission, the Baha'i community, and Islamic organizations.

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 in 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 of the country, and there were several violent economic, ethnic, and political conflicts that took on religious overtones.

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 in the country. The Ambassador and several sections and agencies in 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 was implemented by several agencies and sections of the Mission.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 356,700 square miles and its population is estimated at 137 million; however, there has not been an accurate census for more than 30 years, and many observers believe that the country's population exceeds this figure. Approximately half of the country's population practices Islam, more than 40 percent practices Christianity, and the remainder practice traditional indigenous religions or no religion. Many persons combine elements of Christianity or Islam with elements of a traditional indigenous religion. 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. Catholics constitute the largest Christian denomination.

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; however, there are significant numbers of Christians in urban centers of the north. 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 and Methodists are the majority, although many Igbos continue to observe traditional rites and ceremonies.

Christian missionaries from many denominations operate in the country. 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 resided in the country for a decade or longer. There are fewer foreign Muslim missionaries, and they generally stay in the country 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 in 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 an observer in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) during the period covered by this report. However, there is no state religion.

There are 36 states in the country; governors have substantial autonomy in all decisionmaking 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 (Muslim judges), and pilgrimages to Mecca (hajj). For example, the Governor of Zamfara disbursed public funds to refurbish mosques. However, several states, including northern states, use government revenues to fund Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In general, states, whether dominated by Christians or Muslims, 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. In 2000 Zamfara State began implementing traditional Shari'a in its entirety, with the exception that apostasy was not criminalized. There are 11 other northern states that have adopted at least parts of Shari'a law—Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Borno, 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, though in some states they are given 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; how-

ever, no challenges with adequate legal standing made it through the appellate system during the period covered by this report.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. There were no cases involving Shari'a law that reached the federal appellate level during the period covered by this report.

The Federal Government created a committee to draft uniform Shari'a criminal and procedural codes for states adopting Shari'a; there was no progress on the draft during the period covered by this report.

Each year the Government observes the following Islamic and Christian holy days as national holidays: Eid-el-Asha, Eid-el-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid-el-Maulud, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day.

Christian and Islamic groups planning to build new churches or mosques are required by law to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). This law was put into effect to stem the proliferation of new religious buildings in the absence of zoning laws, to resolve legal questions arising from disputes over church ownership and control, to provide a single registry for government reference in the event that compensation is demanded following civil disturbances, and to allow for legal solemnization of marriages. The law requires religious groups to name a board of trustees, place a notice of the group's intent to organize in three nationwide newspapers, and send trustee information to the CAC. If the CAC receives no objections, the group can proceed with construction. 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 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 Kaduna-based Inter-Faith Mediation Center and the Muslim/Christian Dialogue Forum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government required permits for outdoor public functions; government authorities and those assembling often ignored this requirement. The Government retained legal provisions banning gatherings whose political, ethnic, or religious content might lead to unrest. Many states prohibited open-air religious services held away from places of worship due to fears that these religious services would heighten interreligious tensions or lead to violence. Ondo State continued to ban open-air religious events, and the Kaduna State government enforced a ban on processions, rallies, demonstrations, and meetings in public places on a case-by-case basis. In the southern part of the country, large outdoor religious gatherings were common.

Several northern state governments continued to ban public 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.

In April, the National Broadcasting Commission ruled that televangelists who broadcasted religious miracles would be required to provide evidence to prove the genuineness of the alleged miracles. The Lagos High Court ordered a suspension of the ruling pending its hearing of a lawsuit contesting the policy.

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.

Both Christian and Muslim organizations accused the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Immigration Department of restricting certain religious practitioners from entering the country, particularly persons suspected of intending to hold mass rallies.

While many citizens remain interested in the institutional development of Shari'a jurisprudence, many politicians who once sought to make political gains by pushing for the adoption of Shari'a have turned to other populist issues. In April, the Governor of Zamfara announced a plan called "Shari'a Phase Two" to extend what he termed "Islamic concepts" to governance of education and economic development. He also threatened to demolish houses of worship in his state that did not have proper permits.

The Governor of Kano, who took office after Kano State implemented Shari'a, spearheaded opposition to polio vaccination campaigns for several months, on the grounds that vaccines approved by the World Health Organization were a threat to Muslims' health and fertility, resulting in the infection of over 100 children, and the

spread of polio to 10 previously polio-free countries. By the end of the report period, he had withdrawn his opposition.

In states that expanded Shari'a to criminal matters, all Muslims are subject to the Shari'a criminal codes. In Zamfara State, all 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 Kadi 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. In 2000, the northern state of Kebbi and Sokoto codified gender segregation in schools; some form of gender segregation occurred in many secondary schools elsewhere in the north, but was enforced locally, rather than on a statewide basis. In September, Kano State announced that all Muslim schoolgirls at state-run schools were required to wear the hijab Islamic 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 throughout the country 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 no teachers of "Christian Religious Knowledge" in many northern schools. In the South, many Muslims believed that religious instruction in the schools was similarly biased toward Christians. In Enugu and Edo states, there were reports that Muslim students did not have access to "Islamic Religious Knowledge" in the public schools. Also, Islamic courses were unavailable for students of the University of Ibadan and Ibadan public schools in Oyo State. Unlike in the past, non-Muslim students in Zamfara and Sokoto states were not required to take courses in Islamic Religious Knowledge during the period covered by this report.

No further action was taken, nor is further action likely in relation to a 2003 incident in which the Moslem Students of Nigeria organization invaded primary and secondary schools in Oyo State; also no further action was taken in connection to the arrests of more than 30 students for public disorderliness shortly after the invasions. The students were released on their own recognizance.

In August, Bowen University in Osun State agreed to settle out of court with two students, Aderemi and Afolabi Ogundokun, who were expelled from the school in March 2003 for refusing to attend Christian religious classes. Bowen University has agreed to allow them to transfer to another institution.

In May, Edo State returned ownership of three secondary schools to the Christian organizations that originally owned them. The state took ownership of the schools in the 1970s when the government seized all schools belonging to private organizations during the introduction of universal free primary education. According to press reports, 30 additional primary schools will be returned to their original owners by the end of 2004.

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, especially in Zamfara State, has been affected by certain social provisions of 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. Most states have not criminalized alcohol consumption by non-Muslims; however, in May, 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. Elsewhere in the north, the sale and public consumption of alcohol have been restricted except on Federal Government installa-

tions, such as military and police barracks. In Zamfara State, Christian associations arranged for private transportation services for Christians so that they were not forced to use the gender-segregated transportation provided by the Zamfara State government. Sokoto State's transportation system is run completely by private operators, and Sokoto's governor said that the state could not compel private operators to carry female passengers if doing so violated their religious convictions.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The extension of Shari'a law to cover criminal offenses in many northern states generated a national public debate about whether Shari'a punishments, such as amputation for theft, stoning for adultery, and caning for fornication and public drunkenness, constituted "torture or...inhuman or degrading treatment" under the Constitution.

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 2002, in Katsina State, Amina Lawal was sentenced to death by stoning after confessing to having a child while divorced. In September 2003, the Katsina State Shari'a Court of Appeal overturned the verdict and sentence, ruling that neither her confession nor her conviction was valid. The prosecutor had announced in advance that there would be no further legal action, and Ms. Lawal was freed.

In 2002, a Shari'a court in Bauchi State convicted Yunusa Rafin Chiyawa of adultery and sentenced him to death by stoning. He was the first man to be convicted of adultery under Shari'a law. The Upper Shari'a Court of Bauchi State overturned the verdict and sentence in November 2003.

There are numerous Shari'a cases pending appeal or implementation of sentence. Many of these cases have been delayed continuously for various reasons. However, Bariya Magazu appealed a September 2000 conviction for fornication and having a child out of wedlock and succeeded in getting her sentence reduced from 180 lashes to 100. The sentence was carried out in January 2001.

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 were several pending amputations and stoning sentences in Jigawa, Bauchi, Niger, Kano, and Zamfara States.

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. 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 sanctioned private vigilante Shari'a enforcement groups (known as Hisbah); in some cases these groups had authority to make arrests. The Governor of Jigawa State mobilized a statewide Shari'a enforcement committee to arrest, detain, and prosecute Muslim offenders. The Hisbah groups were not very active during the period covered by this report.

In July 2003, the Kaduna State Court ordered the Government to release an imam from the Kaduna central mosque whom the Government detained in May 2003. 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.

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 of the country, 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 two different ethnic groups with a long history of conflict to have adopted different religions with the effect of exacerbating existing tensions. For example, retaliatory political violence in Plateau State escalated during the reporting period. The violence reached its peak in May when a mainly Christian Tarok militia from a nearby town in Plateau State massacred more than 500 mainly Muslim Hausa/Fulani residents in Yelwa village. The massacre occurred after a February incident in Yelwa in which more than 40 Taroks were burned to death in a church.

A week later in Kano State, Muslims staged a peaceful rally protesting the violence against Muslims in Plateau State. The rally took on a religious dimension when unemployed youth began vandalizing businesses belonging to Christians and erupted into mob violence in which more than 300 Muslims and Christians were killed.

In mid-May, after the violence subsided, the Government declared a state of emergency in Plateau State; however, the state of emergency did not negatively affect religious freedom.

Predominantly ethnic/economic confrontations broke out in Bauchi, Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue, Taraba, and Kano states. Numerous persons were killed, injured, or displaced as a result of these conflicts. Confrontations over economic and land issues sometimes had religious reverberations. There were incidents in which mobs, aroused by economic, land, and political disputes, arbitrarily targeted persons of specific religious and ethnic affiliations, such as in the Kano riot in May.

There were instances in which individuals or groups were targeted primarily based on religious issues and/or because of their religious affiliations. For example, in July, animists destroyed Christian homes and businesses in Nkalaha, Ebonyi State in retaliation for the nonparticipation of Christians in animist rites and traditions. Animists in Ebonyi State insisted that all individuals pay cultural respect to the traditional ruler. Many Christians refused, and in retaliation the animists flogged the Christians. The Christians later complained to the police, who then beat the animists involved in the flogging.

In June, at least 50 persons were killed in Numan, Adamawa State during fighting that began over the rebuilding of the central mosque near a Christian tribal leader's palace. Exactly 1 year before, in June 2003, approximately 100 persons were killed in Numan in a riot sparked by the killing of a Christian evangelist by a Muslim water seller. During the riot, Numan's central mosque was burned. The ethnic Hausa minority began reconstruction of the mosque, but was court ordered to halt reconstruction when a leader of the ethnic Bachama majority complained that the mosque's minaret was taller than his palace. During the 2004 fighting, several mosques and homes were burned, and many residents fled the area. In response to the June 2004 violence, the Governor of Adamawa dethroned the Bachama leader and ordered the relocation of the mosque.

In May, in Jega, Kebbi State, at least 3 persons were killed, 150 to 200 arrested, and up to 8 churches were burned when mobs attacked the town's market, and looted and burned stalls. The violence allegedly began when Christians sent a person to find out about Muslims meeting to organize aid to Yelwa-Shendam victims. When the Muslims discovered the "spy," an argument ensued, escalating into community violence. Community leaders intervened to keep the violence from spreading.

In April, in Kaduna State, a Christian youth, possibly mentally ill, tore up a copy of the Koran and was beaten by Muslim youths. When police took the Christian youth into protective custody, a mob formed at the police station to demand vigilante justice. Police fled with the Christian youth, and the mob burned the police station and up to eight Christian churches. Some members of the mob were arrested, but no charges were filed against them. Tensions remained high in Kaduna State at the end of the period covered by this report.

In March, in Jigawa State, a Muslim man allegedly complained about the volume of services at a nearby Christian church, whereupon the church accused the man of theft. When police took the Muslim man into custody, an irate mob burned several churches and possibly a hotel before order was restored. As is the practice, the police arrested the rioters to prevent retaliatory attacks, but no charges were filed against those persons arrested.

No further action was taken, nor is further action likely in connection with the church and mosque burnings in Abia State in 2003; in Bauchi State in 2002; and in Kano State in 2001. No one remained in detention from these incidents.

On Christmas Day in 2003 in Yobe State, members of "Al Sunna Wal Jamma" ("Followers of the Prophet"), a militant Islamist group, destroyed the police station

in Kanamma, Yobe State, killed a policeman, kidnapped three other officers, and carried away arms and ammunition. The uprising was perhaps in retaliation for an incident in which police allegedly attacked the group over a land rights dispute. The next week, the group attacked police stations in other villages before a joint force of police and army personnel quashed the uprising, killing about 20 and capturing the remaining 50 group members. Security was tightened, and no further militant activity was reported.

In October 2003, in Jigawa State, a female Christian student allegedly insulted the prophet Mohammed during an argument with classmates. Tension simmered until mid-November, when a group of youths went to the school to demand authorization to punish the student themselves. When police dispersed the group, some of the youths set fire to the neighborhood, burning several houses and makeshift churches. Police and religious leaders quickly restored order and prevented the clashes from spreading.

In January 2003, more than 100 Muslims were detained for alleged unlawful assembly and criminal conspiracy following communal disturbances at a village north of Jos in Plateau State. No further action was taken, nor is further action likely. None of the Muslims remained in detention at the end of the reporting period.

No further action was taken, nor is further action likely in relation to the 2002 unrest in Kaduna, Abuja and Zamfara States that followed the publication of an article in the "This Day" newspaper claiming the Prophet Mohammed would have endorsed the Miss World Pageant. No one remained in detention from the incident at the end of the reporting period.

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 parts of the country, 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 (dinners breaking the Ramadan fast) in both Abuja and Lagos in which both Muslims and Christians participated. The U.S. Mission also hosted an Iftar in Kaduna, the scene of Muslim-Christian riots in recent years, and publicly urged the more than 20 Muslim and Christian leaders attending to take a united stand against religious violence. 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: 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 U.S. Mission also continued publishing its informational magazine in Hausa, the language of the predominantly Muslim north.

Twice the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Africa's largest television network, broadcasted nationwide the State Department's television series, "Muslim Life

in America." NTA reportedly received over 300 requests for a taped copy of the program. FRCN Kaduna, northern Nigeria's oldest and most listened-to radio station, also broadcasted the show. The series helped promote discussion and foster understanding by addressing the Muslim community's common misconceptions about the United States.

In January, the U.S. Mission distributed a special edition of its Hausa language magazine to more than 6,000 Muslim youths, to inform them about the experiences of their fellow citizens who were attending American schools and learning about life in a pluralistic society. The special edition included an inside cover page on Ramadan activities in the United States. Another edition in March/April featured the American musical group Native Deen, a group of three American Muslim youths who advocate tolerance and openness to other faiths through hip hop songs. Native Deen performed in Abuja and attracted hundreds of high school students and many Islamic scholars.

Also, in January, the U.S. Mission sponsored an American guest speaker to an international conference in Jos on "Comparative Perspectives on Shari'a in Nigeria." The speaker, Professor Cole Durham of Brigham Young University School of Law, spoke on "Nigeria's 'State Religion' Question in Comparative Perspective." After the conference, Professor Durham traveled to Kano and Zaria where he had dialogue with Christian and Muslim leaders, academics, politicians, and journalists on "Comparative Perspectives on Religion and the State."

The U.S. Mission also nominated nine Muslims, including four women, from its Muslim Outreach Program to participate in International Visitor projects on human rights advocacy, civic education, freedom of the press, rule of law, and women in politics.

The Partnerships for Learning Youth Exchange and Study Program (P4L YES) brought 20 Muslim students and 3 teachers from Sokoto and Kaduna to the United States for educational exchange experiences. The teachers spoke with the news media about their experiences.

In September, the prominent Nigerian Muslim leader Imam Lateef Agdebite, Secretary General of the Nigeria Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, spoke at the U.S. Mission's September 11 commemoration about the need for religious tolerance on a global level.

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 have harassed and detained members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostal, and Catholic groups. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to have trouble in some provinces with their children being expelled from school. A number of religious leaders reported intimidation and harassment related to the presidential and legislative elections held in August 2003 and September 2003, respectively. 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 a total 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 were Catholic, 43.9 percent Protestant, 4.6 percent Muslim, 1.7 claimed no religious beliefs, 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 U.N. Population Fund survey in 1996. 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 Baha'is 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 in the country, 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 2003 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.

Since the Government promulgated a law in 2001 giving it more influence over NGOs as well as religious institutions and organizations, the Ministry of Justice has registered 111 new religious groups, including 29 during the period covered by this report. The Ministry did not deny any new applications. However, the Government continued the previous year's suspension of two "radical" splinter organizations, both of which attempted to register as the primary group of their particular religion. Generally, however, 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 religious holidays as official holidays: Christmas, Easter, Eid-al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, and Assumption.

The Government has not actively supported religious forums aimed at increasing interfaith understanding and support, although several government leaders have participated in conferences organized by individual religious groups. In May, President Paul Kagame addressed a conference held in Kigali for Muslim leaders from 22 countries, in conjunction with Rwanda's Muslim Council. In April, Prime Minister Bernard Makuza held talks with the visiting heads of the World Council of Churches during the African Conference of Churches. Relations between the Government and the Catholic Church continued to improve because of collaboration and dialogue in the areas of education and reconciliation. In addition, in March, 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, the Parliament voted to accept recommendations made by an 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 were all of the same ethnic group. Another example consisted of several churches being 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 should intervene in internal church politics to resolve leadership conflicts, that an association called ABAHAMYA B'IZUKA (operating in Gisenyi Province) should be abolished, and that the Government should counsel churches about which activities were acceptable. It also called on the Parliament to adopt a special law to govern the functioning of all churches in the country.

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 where the marriage certificates are issued due to their refusal to place their hands on the flag.

According to church officials, in 4 of the country's 12 provinces, 43 children of Jehovah's Witnesses were expelled from secondary schools between April and June for refusing to salute the national flag or to sing the national anthem. Church officials have raised the issue with national authorities, but most of the children remained expelled at the end of the period covered by this report. In addition, local authorities in Kibungo, Ruhengeri, Gitarama, and Butare Provinces supported such expulsions. However, three children expelled from schools in Karubanda and three expelled in Nyundo, both in Butare Province, returned to school.

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 March 31, 2004, and he was found guilty and sentenced to 15 years in prison on June 7. On June 14, he filed for an appeal.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were numerous reports of members of Jehovah's Witnesses being detained or arrested for refusing to participate in night security patrols. Since March, a total of 209 Jehovah's Witnesses have been imprisoned or detained on alleged security grounds, 34 of whom faced severe beatings while in detention. Detentions ranged from 1 day to 1 month in length, and although only eight individuals remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report, the Government continued to make new arrests. Jehovah's Witnesses members from 6 of the 12 provinces were arrested on charges of "disobeying government emergency security policy," specifically, refusing to participate in night patrols. In four of the six provinces, local authorities reportedly beat the detained Jehovah's Witnesses. These include 8 that were arrested in Gikongoro Province on March 11; 3 that were arrested on March 25, and another 17 on May 17, in Gitarama Province; 5 arrested on April 29 in Ruhengeri Province; and 4 that were arrested in Gisenyi Province.

Two Jehovah's Witnesses' circuit overseers (church leaders) who travel to various congregations for ministerial activity were arrested. Police arrested Tharcisse Muhire on April 6, 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 Nyabikenke; he was released in May. The other circuit overseer was arrested on June 20 and released the next day after a Jehovah's Witness delegation met with the authorities.

On May 3, soldiers detained a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and accused him of being a part of the Interahamwe political movement. The soldiers imprisoned him and reportedly forced 9 other prisoners to hit him a total of 117 times, after which he was released.

Local authorities in Umutara Province closed a Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall in late April. On May 2, an armed major in the Rwandan Defense Forces dispersed worshippers at a Kingdom Hall in Ruhengeri Province, claiming that the

worshippers were guilty of "divisionism," or trying to undermine the security of the state. Local authorities told church officials they were responding to reports they heard on state-run Radio Rwanda that accused Jehovah's Witnesses of trying to undermine the security of the state. Articles making similar accusations appeared in the state-run newspaper, Imvaho.

There were reports of intimidation of church leaders prior to and during the national presidential and legislative elections, held respectively in August and September 2003. Radio Rwanda, publicly denounced churches whose members abstained from voting. According to religious officials, Protestant church leaders were pressured into allowing members of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to campaign during church services. Members of a number of religious organizations reported that government agents pressured them into donating church resources, either money or vehicles, to support RPF campaign activities.

On January 11, Pentecostal Pastor Majyambere was arrested in Kigali on charges of "preaching rebellion." He remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

In January, in Gisenyi Province, the police detained of 300 Christians, who belonged to the Institute of Saint Fidele. The Christians were accused of "destabilizing public order." Both groups were put through a 1-day education program and released.

On February 15, police arrested eight members of a dissident Catholic congregation in Gisenyi Province. The eight were conducting daily evening prayer meetings on behalf of a sick member of the congregation. They were accused of being involved in "subversive activities" and remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

In March 2003, members of a Pentecostal church were arrested during a prayer service on Mt. Kigali for meeting at night and for practicing their religion outside of their church (both considered to be threats to security). The group had gone into a cave to pray when local security forces arrested them. At the end of the period covered by this report, the leaders of the group were still in detention. Church leaders believe it is a question of mental health and not subversive aims, and that detention is a good alternative to struggling in a society with extremely limited mental health resources.

According to several human rights groups, including Amnesty International and two local organizations, in November 2002, individuals who had split from a Pentecostal church and formed a new congregation were attacked outside their new place of worship in the Gikondo district of Kigali. Local Defense Forces, the mayor of the sector, and civilians reportedly participated in the attack; no one has been held accountable. Intimidation continued through February 2003, culminating in the arrests of the leaders of the church. They remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

In March 2002, the Government arrested Laurent Kalibushi, a dissident Catholic priest, and several members of his prayer group who were holding meetings late at night in a private home in Kigali. Authorities charged that the prayer group, the Mouvement Sacerdotal Marial, was an "unhealthy and anti-social cult" with ties to the 2000 "doomsday cult" deaths in Uganda. Some observers believed that the arrests were a result of the group's ties to the banned political party of former president Bizimungu. All who were detained were released on April 5.

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 February 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, and both cases are under appeal. Of the 31 detainees awaiting trial at the ICTR, 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.

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. Disputes between religious groups are rare; there are numerous associations and interfaith groups that contribute to understanding between the various religions.

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 the religious communities in the country.

The U.S. Government has funded a number of programs that promote religious freedom and interfaith understanding. Working with the Mufti of the country, the Embassy presented books and computers to an Islamic school in Kigali in May. The Embassy sponsored an interfaith commemoration event of September 11, at which a number of religious leaders spoke, both Christian and Muslim. The U.S. Agency for International Development works with several faith-based organizations on health and agricultural initiatives.

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 a total 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 is percent atheist. Protestantism has grown considerably in recent years due to the success of Protestant missionaries in the country. 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 religious holidays 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.

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 a total area of 76,000 square miles, and its population is an estimated 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) that includes Roman Catholics, diverse Protestant denominations, and combined 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 identifiable geographic concentrations of some religious groups. The Christian minority is concentrated in the western and southern regions of the country, while groups that practice traditional religions are concentrated in the eastern and southern regions. Immigrants practice the same faiths as native-born citizens.

A wide variety of foreign missionary groups operate in the country, 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.

During the period covered by this report, a group of Muslim intellectuals and leaders presented to the Government draft legislation for the creation of Shari'a based Islamic Family Law to be made applicable to all Muslims in the country. The Government and many elements of civil society rejected the proposed draft as a threat to religious tolerance and separation of religion and state. While some religious leaders continued to support reforming the national legal code to include Shari'a based law, there were no other coordinated reform efforts.

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 government grants, and the grants are often provided to assist religious groups to maintain their places of worship or undertake special events. All religions have access to these funds.

The Government observes a number of Muslim and Christian holidays. The Muslim holidays observed are Tabaski, Tamkharit, Maouloud, and Korite. The Christian holidays observed are Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, the Feast of the Assumption, and Christmas Day.

Religious organizations are independent of the Government and administer their affairs without government interference. While individuals and groups may practice their beliefs without government sanction, 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 a residence visa from the Ministry of Interior. Christian and Islamic groups often establish a presence in the country as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Religious NGOs obtain permission to operate in the country 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 October 2002, in an effort to increase school enrollment, particularly in rural areas, the Government introduced 2 hours of religious education, Islamic or Christian according to student demand, into the state elementary school curriculum. Privately owned schools, whether or not they receive government grants, may provide religious education. The Ministry of Education also provides funds to schools operated by religious institutions that meet national education standards. In practice, Christian schools, which have a long and successful experience in education, receive the largest share of 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.

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. Demonstrating the country's advocacy of religious tolerance, at the conclusion of an Islamic conference in March, President Wade called for the country to host a conference on Islamic-Christian cooperation and harmony; the conference is tentatively being planned for December 2005.

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, thus reaffirming its support for religious tolerance.

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 issues without fear of government sanction. The Government monitors foreign missionary groups and religious NGOs to ensure that their activities coincide with their stated objectives. In the past, the Government expelled groups from the country when their activities were judged to be political in nature and a threat to

public order; however, there were no reports that any foreign religious groups were asked to leave the country during the period covered by this report.

The Government questioned radical Senegalese imam, Abdour Fall, a self-declared supporter of Osama Bin Laden, after Fall's expulsion from Italy. In a separate incident, government authorities also questioned Imam Fall after he delivered a sermon during which he called for jihad against the West. In both cases Fall was questioned and released from custody the same day without arrest.

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 between Islamic brotherhoods 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 therefore 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. The Catholic-sponsored Brottier Center promoted debate and dialogue between Muslims and Christians on political and social issues that confronted the country.

The Government also actively promoted Islamic-Christian dialogue to preserve social harmony and deepen interfaith understanding.

One isolated incident of interfaith violence took place in August 2003. Unidentified youths from Dakar's Dieuppel III neighborhood threw stones at Christian worshippers over complaints that the churchgoers' loud chanting created a nuisance. Police had been alerted to the potential for violence but took no preventive measures. The attack, which resulted in minor injuries, drew widespread public criticism. However, no arrests were made and criticism has ceased.

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 in the country, including the Mouride, Tidiane, Lyssane, and Qadriyya Islamic brotherhoods and Christian groups. The Ambassador and other Embassy staff meet with religious leaders or their representatives throughout the year to discuss social and political issues. The Embassy maintains contacts with several religious-based NGOs, foreign missionary groups operating in the country, 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 and stressing that these values are shared with the country. The Embassy has translated, published, and distributed a "Muslim Life in America" brochure in the two major national languages (Wolof and Pulaar). The Ambassador personally launched the publication of this brochure at a conference that received extensive and favorable coverage in all local media, including national television. In March, the U.S. Embassy hosted an American Muslim expert on Sufi Islam, who met with Islamic community leaders and spoke at the Islamic Institute. In September 2003, the Embassy hosted a visit by a subgroup of the Djerejian Commission on Public Diplomacy in the Muslim and Arab World, who met with a wide array of local Muslim leaders.

The Embassy makes particular efforts during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan to host Iftar dinners and deliver traditional gifts to religious leaders in recognition of their daily fasts. During Ramadan, the Embassy organized several programs, and every public program and statement from the Embassy and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) began with best wishes for Ramadan; a small but significant gesture that was greatly appreciated locally and reported by the media. President Bush's and Secretary Powell's Ramadan messages and Iftar receptions 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 a total area of approximately 444 square miles, and its population is approximately 80,100. According to a July 2003 estimate by the country's Ministry of Information Systems Division, about 87 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 7 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, although there are no mosques or temples in the islands. Almost 50 percent of the population is estimated to be religiously active. It is unknown whether there are atheists in the country.

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 and the Islamic mosques have individual acts of incorporation. The Baha'i local spiritual assembly was incorporated in 1999. 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 al-

lowed 15-minute broadcasts every Friday, and the Baha'i and Seventh-day Adventists 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. Former President France Albert Rene's wife is a member of the Baha'i Faith, while the majority of government ministers are Catholic.

The Roman Catholic holidays of Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Cristi, Assumption of Mary, All Saints Day, and Christmas are national holidays. These holidays do not negatively affect any religious groups.

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 (2 million Seychelles rupees) to the Roman Catholic Church.

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, the Baha'i and Hindu religions have benefited from these grants, which are awarded on a case-by-case basis and based on the availability of the budget.

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.

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 29,925 square miles and its population is approximately 5 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 January 2002, resulted in movement by major segments of the population. Religion was not a factor in the displacement of the

more than 500,000 refugees who fled the country or the 2 million persons who were internally displaced.

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-el-adha, Maoulid-Un-Nabi, and Eid el-fitir holidays, and the Christian Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas holidays. These observances do not negatively impact any religious groups.

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.

The Government has not taken any specific steps 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 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. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) has disappeared as a terrorist organization, although some of its former members have organized into a legal political party that has attracted a small following.

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. The IRC criticized the use of force and atrocities committed by the rebels during the war, endorsed reconciliation and peace talks, and facilitated rehabilitation of the victims affected by the war, including former child soldiers.

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 is in frequent contact with the IRC and its individual members. In November 2003, the U.S. Ambassador hosted an Iftar celebration for Muslims and Islamic leaders. Members of the IRC, including both Christian and Muslim leaders, often are featured in Embassy-hosted Public Diplomacy events, including discussions on the role of religious communities in sustainable development.

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 U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 246,200 square miles, and its population is approximately 8.3 million; however, population figures are difficult to estimate given the instability of the country. Citizens overwhelmingly are Sunni Muslim, although there is a small number of non-Sunni Muslims. There also is a small, extremely low-profile Christian community, in addition to small numbers of adherents 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 (see section III).

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.

There is no central government. A Transitional National Government (TNG) was created in 2000 following the Somalia Reconciliation Conference in Arta, Djibouti, but it failed to establish effective control outside of Mogadishu and its mandate expired in August 2003. The Transitional Charter, adopted in 2000 but not implemented by the end of the period covered by this report, establishes Islam as the national religion. A draft transitional charter under consideration at the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference (SNRC) in Mbagathi, Kenya cites Islam as the official religion and several Somali sheikhs have announced that a new government formed at the SNRC must reflect a commitment to Islamic governance and morals. Some local administrations, including the "Republic of Somaliland" and "Puntland," have made Islam the official religion in their regions; however, regional authorities do not espouse rhetoric against non-Muslims.

The judiciary in most regions relies on some combination of traditional and customary law (Xeer), Shari'a law, the penal code of the pre-1991 Siad Barre government, or some combination of the three. Shari'a courts throughout Mogadishu are rapidly reasserting their authority, attracting support from businessmen, and working across clan lines. In addition two Shari'a courts were established in Beledweyne, in the Hiran region, during 2003. One of the courts was designated for the Hawadle clan and the other for the Galjecel clan; the courts are segregated to alleviate fears that members of one clan might not be fair in dealing with cases involving members of the other clan.

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 by law in Puntland and Somaliland and effectively blocked by informal social consensus elsewhere in the country. While 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 addition, in April thousands of citizens marched through the streets in Mogadishu and in the southern coastal town of Merca protesting at what they said was an attempt by aid agencies to spread Christianity. Muslim scholars organized the protest following reports that school children were given 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 the country.

In March Mohamed Omar Habeb, who controls the Middle Shabbelle region, banned women from wearing veils and subsequently jailed at least 17 women who had violated the decree. He alleged that veils made it difficult to distinguish men who might be concealing weapons from women. Habeb was quoted as saying that he was devoted to curbing violent attacks by extremists, but he later released the women following outcry by many Islamic scholars throughout the country, particularly Mogadishu.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Article 8 of the Transitional National Charter and Article 6.3 of the Puntland Charter prohibit torture "unless sentenced by Islamic Shari'a Courts in accordance with Islamic Shari'a law." Unlike in recent years, there were no reports that militias administered summary punishment. Islamic courts continue to operate throughout the country in the absence of a national judicial system operated by a central government.

Unlike in the period covered by the previous report, there were no reports that persons were deported for proselytizing.

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 strong societal pressure to respect Islamic traditions, especially in enclaves still influenced but not controlled by radical Islamists in Doble, Ras Chaimboni, and Kulbiyow in the Lower Juba region. Organized Islamic groups whose goal is the establishment of an Islamic state include Al-Islah, a generally nonviolent movement that operates primarily in Mogadishu, and al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), the country's largest militant Islamic organization. While AIAI has committed terrorist acts in the past and has adherents throughout the region, 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 were several fatal attacks against non-Muslim international relief and charity workers throughout the country and in the region of Somaliland in late 2003 and in the current year. In addition there have been recent threats against non-Muslim Westerners in the country, including in Somaliland.

The number of externally funded Koranic schools continued to increase throughout the country. These schools are inexpensive and provide basic education; however, there were reports that these schools required young girls to wear veils and participate in other conservative Islamic practices not normally 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. The number of madrassas, which are private schools providing both religious and secular education, continued to increase during the period covered by this report.

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 in the country. This lack of diplomatic representation has limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom.

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 Department of Education adopted the Religion in Education Policy in September 2003. This policy sets out guidelines for how religious education, religious instruction, and religious observances can be addressed in public and private schools.

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 470,463 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. Approximately 4 percent of the population indicated that it belongs to other religions, which include Hinduism (1.2 percent), Islam (1.5 percent), Judaism (0.2 percent), and African Traditional beliefs (0.3 percent). Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated that it belongs to no particular religion or refused to indicate its affiliation.

The African Independent Churches are the largest group of Christian churches. There are 4,000 or more African Independent Churches, 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 consist mostly of Zionist or Apostolic churches and also include some Pentecostal branches. The Zion Christian Church is the largest African Independent Church with 11.1 percent of the population. The African Independent Churches attract persons from rural and urban areas.

Other Christian churches include the Dutch Reformed family of churches, including the Nederduits Gereformeerde, Nederduits Hervormde, and Gereformeerde churches, which consist of approximately 6.7 percent of the population; and the Catholic churches, which consist of approximately 7.1 percent of the population. Protestant denominations include the Methodist Church (6.8 percent), the Anglican churches (3.8 percent), various Lutheran churches (2.5 percent), Presbyterian churches (1.9 percent), Baptist churches (1.5 percent), and the Congregational churches (1.1 percent). 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. The subsidiary churches of the charismatic 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 total population claims no affiliation with any formal religious organization. The majority of these persons adhere to traditional indigenous religions. A common feature of traditional indigenous religions is the importance of ancestors. Ancestors are regarded as part of the community and as indispensable links to the spirit world and the powers that control everyday affairs. Ancestors are not regarded as gods, but because they play a key part in bringing about either good or ill fortune, maintaining good relations with them is considered vital. Followers of traditional indigenous religions also believe that certain practitioners may manipulate the power of the spirits by applying elaborate procedures that are passed down by word-of-mouth. While some practitioners use herbs, others use 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 2001 census, approximately 87 percent of Whites are Christian and almost 1.4 percent are Jewish. Nearly half (47.3 percent) of Indians are Hindus, and the remaining 49 percent is either Muslim (24.6 percent) or Christian (24.4 percent), with the remaining 3.7 percent in other categories. The majority of Muslims are Indian or belong to the multi-ethnic community in the Western Cape. Approximately 80 percent of black Africans are Christian. Approximately 87 percent of Coloreds are Christian, while 7.4 percent are Muslim. Regarding the lack of religious affiliation, 17.5 percent of black Africans and 8.8 percent of Whites claim no affiliation.

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 in the country, 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 on the basis of 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 in the country, the law recognizes no state religion. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths, including various Christian denominations, Islam, and Judaism.

The Department of Education launched the Religion in Education Policy in September 2003. The policy defines "religion education" as a curricular program with clear and age-appropriate educational aims and objectives for teaching and learning about religion and religious diversity in the country and throughout the world. "Religious instruction" in this policy is understood to include teaching the tenets of a specific faith to advocate that faith. The policy contends that religious instruction is primarily the responsibility of the home, the family, and the religious community. The policy also deals with the question of "religious observances," particularly within the context of school assemblies. The Constitution and the South African Schools Act provide that these three aspects of religion in education are subject to rules made by the appropriate authorities, including the provincial education departments, as long as they are made within the context of "free and voluntary association" and "on an equitable basis."

Previously, the Department of Education used a syllabus that required public schools to administer one period of religious instruction per week. There are some private religious schools in which religious instruction is required; however, many public schools have dropped religious instruction.

Only Christian holidays, 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 National Association of School Governing Bodies has requested the Government to review all public holidays of a religious nature to ensure fairness and equity in religion. In November 2003, then-Minister of Home Affairs Mangosuthu Buthelezi appointed an interdepartmental task team to review the public holiday system. This process questioned whether religious holidays—other than Christian holidays—should also be observed nationally. The task team did not release its findings during the period covered by this report.

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.

The Government allows, but does not require, teaching and learning "religion education" and "religious diversity" in public schools. The Government does not allow "religious instruction," or advocating the tenets of a particular faith, in public schools.

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.

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. Today, however, PAGAD maintains a small but much less visible presence in the Cape Town Muslim community. The police have not attributed any terrorist acts to PAGAD since the November 2002 bombing of the Bishop Lavis offices of the Serious Crimes Unit in the Western Cape. No one was injured in the blast. According to the head of the Cape Town Serious Crimes Unit, the case is still under investigation. No arrests have been made, but the South African Police Service (SAPS) is still investigating a possible link with PAGAD.

Qibla, an offshoot of Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalism, avows a political, pro-Islamic jihad. It is an ally of PAGAD and has an anti-U.S., anti-Israel stance. Qibla's Shi'ite radicalism sharply contrasts with the generally conservative and apolitical Muslim community (mainly Sunni) in Cape Town. In April, Qibla demonstrated its presence in Cape Town, organizing a march of approximately 500 people to protest the killing by Israelis of Hamas leader Sheik Yassin. Other Qibla demonstrations against U.S. policy in Iraq drew a very small number of supporters.

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 official and unofficial bilateral and multilateral ecumenical contacts between the 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, leaders from the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Council of Churches in Gauteng issued a statement on December 20, 2003, calling on the Government to "condemn the ongoing violation of human rights in Zimbabwe."

There were unconfirmed reports of killings linked to the continued targeting of alleged practitioners of witchcraft during the period covered by this report. Allegations of incidents of witchcraft continued, particularly in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. In one incident, the buried body of a young man was dug up in Umlazi Cemetery, KwaZulu-Natal. Various body parts were removed. Police and residents in the area believed the motive for the crime was witchcraft.

In August 2003, two young children were brutally murdered in Malamulele, outside Giyani in Limpopo. The arrested man had accused the children's parents of witchcraft.

There also were reports of killings linked to the practice of Satanism. The Government does not keep records on cases of reported witchcraft and Satanism killings. These cases are investigated and prosecuted as homicide by law enforcement officials.

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. For example, the U.S. Embassy's Political Counselor met with the African National Congress' Religion Commissioner to discuss the importance of dialogue and communication between different persons in civil society, including religious groups. Representatives of the Embassy and Consulates have frequent contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country. In March, national and provincial Muslim leaders met in Mpumalanga.

The U.S. Government actively engaged with the religious community in the period covered by this report. As with the meeting in Mpumalanga, Embassy and Consulate representatives have intensified engagement with academics, journalists, and other members of civil society in the Muslim community. The Embassy and Consulates held several interfaith Iftaar dinners during Ramadan and distributed copies of "Muslim Life in America" and the poster "Mosques in America." The Consulate in Durban created an "e-mail collective" for influential KwaZulu-Natal community Muslims who are willing to circulate U.S. Government-provided information, which is not carried often by the local press. They also attended the inauguration ceremony of a newly expanded Muslim school in Durban, pledged support for the school's library collection, and selected a Fulbright student from KwaZulu-Natal to go to the United States for a Ph.D. program in Islamic studies. Mindset, a non-governmental organization (NGO), received a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) grant for health broadcasts on television. The NGO used the grant to sponsor an interview between an officer of the Consulate of Johannesburg and Channel Islam International.

The Consulate in Cape Town donated computers to faith-based organizations that cared for orphans and worked on HIV/AIDS prevention. The Consulate also ad-

dressed the Jewish community at a commemoration for an Israeli astronaut who died in the Columbia shuttle tragedy. Finally, the Consulate identified and selected prominent leaders of faith-based organizations for International Visitor programs.

SUDAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government continues to place many restrictions on non-Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, and Muslims from tribes or sects not affiliated with the ruling party. The Government came into power through a coup in 1989 with a goal of Islamization, and it treats Islam as the state religion, declaring that it must inspire the country's laws, institutions, and policies. The country has been locked in civil war many years. A major step towards peace was achieved with the signing of the three latest Naivasha Protocols on May 26, 2004 and the Nairobi Declaration on June 5; however, a comprehensive peace agreement has not yet been reached in the north-south peace process. The issue of how Islamic law (Shari'a) will be applied throughout the country has been settled by these protocols, but they have not yet been implemented.

In the west in the three Darfur states, a war between government-supported militias drawn from largely pastoralist, Arabized Muslim tribes and largely non-nomadic African Muslims continued throughout the reporting period, resulting in ethnic cleansing and redistribution of African Muslim populations in the region. Many observers believe it is primarily an ethnic and racial conflict rather than a religious one.

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 enforce numerous restrictions against non-Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, and those Muslims not from tribes or sects affiliated with the ruling party. While it remains to be seen what effect the Naivasha Protocols and other agreements will have in practice, these agreements clearly establish the principle of freedom of religion throughout the country and grant specific states (including those covered by the protocols: Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains, Abyei, and Upper Blue Nile) powers over judicial and social matters and primary and secondary education to ensure this in practice at the state and local level. Under the agreement, in the capital, non-Muslims may not be subjected to the harsher forms of physical punishments provided for by Shari'a, but may face "remitted penalties."

Relations among religious groups improved somewhat during the period covered by this report. There was increased dialogue among the various religious communities under the auspices of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), a government-supported organization formed in December 2002, and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), although confidence among members of different religions is not high.

The U.S. Government continued to promote religious freedom and human rights in the country with the Government and the public throughout the reporting period. The U.S. Government has made it clear to the Government that the problem of religious freedom is a serious impediment to an 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 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 a total area of 1,556,108 square miles, and its population is an estimated 30 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 the last 2 decades of civil war, but most 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. Most citizens in the south adhere to either Christianity or traditional indigenous religions (animists); however, there are some 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, especially in areas outside of government control. There also is evidence that in the south many new converts to Christianity continue to adhere to elements of traditional indigenous practices. Catholics estimate their 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.

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.

The country's religious divergence is aggravated by the perception among southerners and non-Arab Muslims that they are second-class citizens. 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 independence. The southern ethnic groups fighting the civil war seek some form of regional self-determination; the south will vote on unity or independence in a referendum in 6 years after a comprehensive peace agreement is implemented, following a pre-transition period of 6 months.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the north-south peace process was entering its final phase and negotiations between the two sides concerned finalization and implementation of the agreements. 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 is to continue to be the basis of the national legal system as it applies in the north; national legislation applicable to the south is to be based on "popular consensus, the values, and the customs of the people." In states or regions where a majority hold 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. Throughout the country, the application of Shari'a to non-Muslims is to be limited, and courts may not exercise their discretion to impose the harsher physical forms of Shari'a penalties on non-Muslims.

In the west in the three Darfur states, a war between militias drawn from largely pastoralist, Arabized Muslim tribes (government-supported) and largely non-nomadic African Muslims throughout the reporting period, resulting in ethnic cleansing and redistribution of African Muslim populations in the region. Many observers believe it is primarily an ethnic conflict.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government continues to impose many restrictions on non-Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, and those from tribes and sects not affiliated with the ruling party, such as in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. Although the Government has not interfered with actual worship and does not arrest or detain persons for practicing their religion per se, it treats its form of Islam as the state religion and has declared that Islam must inspire the country's laws, institutions, and policies. The Constitution provides that, "Shari'a and custom are the sources of legislation."

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 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 generally are granted in practice; however, the process for applications to build churches is more difficult. The Guidance and Endowment Minister has denied building permits to most non-Muslim religious groups, alleging that local restrictions prohibit building places of worship in residential neighborhoods due to considerations of noise, numbers of worshippers, and other factors. The last permit was issued around 1975.

There have been improvements in relations among the various religious communities under the auspices of SIRC and the SCC, which represents 12 church denomi-

nations. The SCC acknowledges an increase in the amount of dialogue but does not believe there has been enough improvement in the nature of the dialogue to change religious relations. The SCC continues to express reservations about SIRC's power to create change. In Nairobi and Juba, southerners have created the New Council of Churches.

In December 2003, the Government invited Franklin Graham, an evangelical preacher, to visit the country. Graham received a warm welcome, and the state TV station covered his visit. Government officials have attended church services on Easter and Christmas to show solidarity and address the non-Muslims, but the Government will not allow Christians to enter mosques during Muslim festivals.

The Government, through the Guidance and Endowment Ministry, claims that it practices religious tolerance. However, non-Muslims, as well as non-Arab Muslims and Muslims from tribes and sects not affiliated with the ruling party, such as in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains, continued to express concern that they are treated as second-class citizens and discriminated against not only in such religious matters as in the issuance of permits for the building of churches, but 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. Non-Muslims and a large number of Muslims are outspoken about their unease with the general application of Shari'a law to their communities, especially but not limited to non-Muslims.

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; however, it was unknown how these regulations affected church construction during the reporting period.

While non-Muslims may convert to Islam, the law makes apostasy (conversion from Islam to another religion) punishable by death.

The Government continued to restrict the activities of Christians, followers of traditional indigenous beliefs, and other non-Muslims, although two Jehovah's Witnesses confirmed their increased ability to move around the country and open places of worship without restriction.

The Government restricts at least one Islamic group, Taqfir al-Hijra, which conducted violent acts against other Muslims.

The Government considers itself an Islamic government, and Islamization is an important objective. Muslims may proselytize freely in government-controlled areas. The Government has been less restrictive of Christian groups with an historical presence in the country and also in areas controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the south.

Missionaries continued to operate in the south, running food relief operations, medical clinics, and churches, with some operations also in government-controlled areas. Christian religious workers, including priests and teachers, like almost all visitors, experience delays in getting visas to visit the country. 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.

Religious minority rights are not protected, since the Government treats Islam as the "state" religion with an open policy of Islamization freely promulgated, despite the constitutional provision for freedom of religion.

Despite an official policy of local autonomy and federalism, many non-Muslims, as well as non-Arab Muslims and Muslims from tribes and sects not affiliated with the ruling party, such as in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains, state that they are treated as second-class citizens and discriminated against in government jobs and contracts in the north and government-controlled southern areas. Several thousand experienced workers, who were non-party affiliated Muslims, were replaced at the state-owned Sudan TV station with hard-line party Muslims or friends and relatives of the leadership. It is not clear if this personnel action had a religious aspect or was political in nature, a problem in cases involving Muslim groups not affiliated with the ruling party. Few non-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.

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. 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. Although 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 monitors some religious and quasi-religious Islamic groups, particularly those that oppose the Government through political platforms or violence against government-affiliated mosques.

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.

While the Government permits non-Muslims to participate in services in existing, authorized places of worship, it continued to deny permission to construct new churches. The Guidance and Endowment Minister claims his ministry has granted permission for new places of worship, but that the local authorities have denied this permission based on criteria developed for their areas, such as that no similar church may be within a certain radius of the proposed construction and that there be a minimum number of worshippers for that church in the locality.

The problem of building shops in and around a Christian cemetery reportedly was solved when the Governor of Khartoum intervened and prohibited the building of any shops in the area. Owners had apparently attempted to build their shops inside the cemetery fence to avoid paying taxes.

There is a shortage of space within the city, 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 continues the practice of razing the residences and temporary religious buildings constructed by IDPs, although at times the Government has razed the houses and spared makeshift churches. IDPs from the south are generally Christians and practitioners of traditional indigenous religions; IDPs from Darfur are mainly Muslim. While planning continues for procedures to grant the IDPs legal title to land in other parts of the Khartoum area and to move squatters in advance of demolitions, in practice the demolitions have taken place before the moves and the squatters have been forced to live and worship in shanties made from plastic bags and cardboard boxes. The Government has justified these actions on the basis that the squatters do not own the land they are occupying or 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. Because under Islamic law, a non-Muslim woman is viewed as taking on the religion of her husband at marriage, a Muslim man may marry a Christian or Jew. The children 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 licensed or recognized as official 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).

Various governmental bodies have decreed that women must dress modestly according to Islamic standards, including wearing a head covering. Christian women are required to cover their heads to have their photo taken for the official identity card. There was an unconfirmed press report in April that police flogged a Christian woman for inappropriate dress (lack of a headscarf and clothing that was too tight);

however, in general, police enforcement of such decrees is rare. At times police on university campuses are stricter about women following a dress code, but women are often seen in public wearing trousers or with their heads uncovered. These acts are violations of regulations against indecency, but the Public Order Police generally only issued warnings for improper dress. In 2000, the governor of Khartoum State issued a decree forbidding women from working in businesses that serve the public, such as hotels, restaurants, and gas stations. In 2001, the constitutional court overturned the decree, and women are employed throughout society and work in many service industries, especially restaurants and hotels.

The Government considers abandoned children or those of unknown parentage, regardless of presumed religious origin, to be both citizens and Muslims, and whom may only be adopted by Muslims. Non-Muslims may adopt only non-Muslim children. No equivalent restriction is placed on Muslims adopting orphans or other children. In accordance with Islamic law, children adopted by Muslims do not take their adopted parents' name and are not automatic heirs to the parents' property.

In general, non-Muslims are allowed to worship freely in their places of worship. Although Christians in the north are not generally given time off on Sunday for prayer, in the south Muslims are given a half-day off on Friday. In some parts of the south, the SPLA reportedly has occupied churches, along with other buildings, to use during the conflict. The Catholic Church established the New Sudan Council of Churches in the south, which has different programs from the SCC in Khartoum, such as peace building and conflict resolution.

The Government controls importation of any kind or quantity of 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.

Newspaper suspensions continue, but not specifically for religious reasons as in the period covered by the previous report. For example, any mention of Darfur has been the main excuse for shutting down the press, including the English-language Khartoum Monitor, as well as numerous Arabic papers.

The Koran 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

Since the north/south civil war resumed in 1983, an estimated 2 million persons have been killed in the violence or have died from the effects of humanitarian needs; approximately 4 million have been displaced internally as a result of fighting between the Government and insurgents in the south. In addition, more than 1 million persons have been internally displaced within Darfur and 200,000 refugees have fled to Chad.

There is a religious aspect to the north/south civil war—the Government is dominated by northern Arab Muslims, while the southern ethnic groups fighting the civil war largely follow traditional indigenous religions or Christianity. The Government declared a "jihad" (Muslim holy war) against the southern rebels. With the peace negotiations that began in June 2002 nearing conclusion, this rhetoric has diminished. The Government continues to insist that Shari'a form the basis of a unified state, while southerners insist on secular law. Discussions and seminars on Shari'a are numerous, and opinions vary about the extent of Islamization required and how strict or liberal Arab Islam should be vis-à-vis other religions and ethnicities.

Security forces hold wide authority and monitor both churches and mosques. Security and police forces have not detained persons because of 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. There have been complaints about the public order police (religious police) jumping walls and entering non-Muslim houses to check for alcohol. These police have been known to harass non-Arab Muslims, as well. The public order police have the security forces' support but have been less invasive than in previous years. One Pentecostal minister, an advisor to the Guidance and Endowment Minister, said he raised these issues with the Government's Human Rights Advisory Council and the Interior Ministry, but they both support the police. Since these actions have been more against dark non-Arabs, regardless

of religion, there is concern among southerners about how they will be treated under a unity government after a comprehensive peace agreement is signed and implemented.

In 2002, police arrested approximately 50 members of a radical Muslim group who considered anyone outside their group to be infidels and subject to punishment. Some members of the group were alleged to have blown up a mosque in Khartoum during Ramadan, killing worshippers. All the followers except those suspected of actually being involved in the bombing were released after lengthy dialogue with Islamic scholars.

The Government officially exempts the 10 southern states, in which the population is mostly non-Muslim, from Hudud law—the part of Shari'a which permits physical punishments, including flogging, amputation, and stoning. In the last year, there were a number of sentences of flogging and cross-amputation, but few were carried out. However, in Darfur, these sentences are given to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. According to officials, under Hudud there must be four witnesses to adultery. In a recent case, a Christian girl in Darfur became pregnant and was sentenced to flogging; the Muslim man allegedly involved in the incident was acquitted of any wrongdoing. Fear of imposition of Shari'a outside Khartoum on non-Muslims and African Muslims is one of the factors that has fueled support for the civil war.

On May 20, 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 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.

Local officials in Renk demolished an Episcopal school located in the path of a new highway. The SIRC worked with local officials and the Episcopal Church to reach an agreement whereby the local officials agreed to provide the church with new land and some funds to compensate for the building. However, the church noted that in February and March, security forces disrupted work on the new school and there had been no further compensation.

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 6 years after the peace agreement is signed, are rewarding persons for converting to Islam and that the Government's military forces are forcing some conversions to Islam. Abandoned children taken off the streets are considered to be Muslim regardless of their origin, but the Government does not view this assumption of religion as forced conversion. 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 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

There continued to be improved dialogue and interaction between Muslims and Christians through SIRC, although feelings of mistrust and lack of confidence remained among non-Muslims. Different religious groups also conduct dialogue through the SCC. There were several conferences on religion hosted by international NGOs that resulted in spirited discussion but reached no consensus, particularly on the interpretation and application of Shari'a law and its prescribed Hudud punishments.

Catholic Church officials continued to have doubts about working with the SIRC because they believe it is totally government-controlled, it does not represent grass-

roots communities, and its board is made up of selected Muslim clergy and SCC staff who make all the decisions.

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 actions as well as words will help to develop a more positive relationship between the two countries. 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.

The Charge met on a regular basis with leaders from many Muslim sects 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. U.S. Embassy officers consistently raised religious freedom issues at all levels of government and discussed possible benchmarks the U.S. Government could use to judge improvement of human rights for eventual relaxing or lifting of economic sanctions. Particular concerns included permits to build new churches, visas and travel permits, and religious publications. In March, the Director of the U.S. State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom met with government and religious leaders in Khartoum to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country.

U.S. diplomatic efforts to bring about peace have continued to focus on promoting religious dialogue through the SIRC and SCC, and the Embassy has promoted relationships with religious leaders from both Muslim and Christian traditions. Public diplomacy outreach has included several programs discussing religious freedom.

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 were considered to have political implications.

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 approximately 6,700 square miles (approximately the size of the state of New Jersey), and its population is approximately 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 40 percent Zionist, 20 percent Roman Catholic, and 1 percent Islamic. The remainder of the population is divided between 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 in the country.

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, evangelicals, 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, al-

though authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that were considered to have political implications.

New religious groups or churches are expected to register with the Government upon organizing. To be considered organized, a religious group must demonstrate either possession of 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. However, there is no law describing the organizational requirements of a religious group. While organized religious groups are exempt from paying taxes, they are not considered tax-deductible charities. All religions are recognized unofficially.

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, but makes concerted efforts to attend the national Good Friday and Ascension worship services at the national stadium in the Ezulweni Valley, both of which are hosted by participating churches of the local evangelical movement. 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. However, 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 five religious channels, including Trinity Broadcasting Network and The God Channel.

Non-Christian groups sometimes experienced minor delays in obtaining residence and building permits from the Government.

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 adjoining 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. Each organization has strong public opinions that sometimes differ from one another; however, on several occasions, they have addressed common issues, such as 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.

In 2004 the Baha'i faith celebrated its 50th year in the country. The celebration was well attended by government officials including members of the Royal Family.

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, there continued to be increased tension 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.

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 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, supervise all Zanzibari mosques, and to approve religious lectures by foreign clergy or the importation of Islamic literature from outside Zanzibar.

On the mainland, mosques belonging to the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA) elect a mufti of their own. BAKWATA serves as a nongovernmental organization (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. At the end of the period covered by this report, 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. 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 Prevention of Terrorism Act, which was signed into law in December 2002. This legislation does not mention any religious or ideological group; however, Muslim clerics, some local media, and the Legal and Human Rights Center, a local human rights NGO, have been highly critical of 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. As of the end of the reporting period, there were no reports that authorities had arrested suspects, seized property, or applied any other sanctions under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

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.

A law approved in 2002 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 had received 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 certain civil cases—those involving family matters such as marriage, divorce, child-custody and inheritance—Islamic law is applied if both parties are Muslims. BAKWATA occasionally appeals to the secular civil authorities for assistance in resolving quasi-religious disputes such as the ownership of mosques. 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.

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-el-Fitr, 1 day for the Muslim holiday of Eid-el-Haj, and 1 day for the Muslim holiday of Maulid.

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.

On May 22, 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The law prohibits preaching or distribution of materials that are considered inflammatory and represent a threat to the public order.

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.

On May 28, 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. The Government of Zanzibar reportedly deported the controversial Muslim cleric because of a 1993 government order by then President Salmin Amour, which banned Shauri from the island after he was accused of disrupting the peace and fomenting inter-religious conflict.

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 was not equal to the number of Christians. In turn, Christians criticize 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. 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.

The Government made some efforts to resolve the growing tensions between Muslim and Christian communities. In May, President Mkapa, a Catholic, attended the consecration of a Lutheran bishop, and called on all citizens to respect each other's faith. The same month, Foreign Minister Jakaya Kikwete, a Muslim, attended a choir service at a Pentecostal Church. While the President regularly participates in Muslim celebrations such as Iftar dinners during Ramadan, the Government held no formal interdenominational meetings during the period of this report. In August 2003, however, former President Ali Hassan Mwinyi and former OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim participated in the "International Forum for Peace and Good Governance," which was sponsored by the World Muslim Congress and attended by Catholic and Lutheran leaders.

In the Zanzibari government, the Office of the Mufti has denounced hard-line Muslim groups, but has not engaged them in dialogue. Many interdenominational initiatives exist at national and community levels without formal Government participation. A decade ago, the Catholic National Bishops Conference, Lutheran Bishops, and BAKWATA leadership established an ecumenical dialogue that remains active. In April, the mainland mufti, who is not a civil servant, said that the true meaning of jihad was to promote development in society and not to fight against non-Muslims. These remarks, and his earlier statements encouraging religious tolerance, were widely reported, particularly in the Government and CCM-owned press.

The overall situation for women is less favorable in Zanzibar, which has a majority Muslim population, 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 de-

ceased 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, perceiving 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 created in early 2003 continued 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, Zanzibari police used tear gas to disperse a demonstration by Uamsho (also known as Islamic Revival or Center for Islamic Propagation), an umbrella organization for fundamentalist Muslim organizations. The group does not recognize Zanzibar's Mufti Law and therefore had refused to seek a permit from the mufti's office as required. The Office of the Mufti and the police had publicly warned Uamsho in advance that its demonstration would be illegal. Reportedly, the demonstrators included some minors and were armed with stones and machetes. Seven demonstrators suffered minor injuries when the police broke up the demonstration. Thirty-two demonstrators were arrested. Two Uamsho leaders faced charges in connection with the demonstration, and by the end of the reporting period they had been released on bail, and their case was pending.

Also during March, there was a series of small explosions and firebombings in and near Stonetown on Zanzibar; the targets included a vehicle belonging to a church and the mufti's house, which was damaged slightly. The police arrested 45 persons, including some Uamsho members, in connection with the bombings; the Uamsho members have alleged that they were beaten while they were in custody. At the end of the reporting period, Zanzibari police confirmed that they had released without charge some of the individuals arrested in connection with the bombings; others were charged and released on bail. All of these cases were still pending at the end of the period covered by this report. The police did not confirm if any of the people charged in the bombings were affiliated with Uamsho or any other religious organization; Uamsho representatives said that none of its members faced charges in the bombings.

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 the police from performing its duties. By March, the Government had dropped all charges, and all were released.

Under Zanzibar's 2001 Mufti Act, the mufti has the authority to determine the date of major religious observances; Answar Sunni had been involved in a long-running dispute with the Zanzibar government over which Muslim leaders had the authority to set annual religious observances.

In February 2002, Sheikh Issa Ponda was rearrested and charged with murder as one of the nine Muslim leaders held responsible for the Mwembechai mosque riots in 1999. Ponda was denied bail and remained in prison until charges against him and eight other suspects were dropped in August 2003.

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 rose in urban centers due to some Muslim groups' claims of discrimination in government hiring and law enforcement practices. There also were other signs of increased religious tensions between Christians and Muslims. For example, there were reports during the reporting period that at certain Muslim religious rallies in urban centers, some participants publicly criticized Christianity, offending some Christians and, on occasion, resulting in fighting.

There were signs of increasing tension between secular Muslims and Muslim fundamentalists, as the latter believed that the former had joined with the Government for monetary and other benefits. The fundamentalist Muslims accused the Government of being a Christian institution, and charged that Muslims in power were interested only in safeguarding their positions. In November 2003, drivers of Zanzibar's "dala dala" minibuses went on strike over new safety regulations that they considered onerous. A fundamentalist Muslim leader was arrested after he publicly encouraged the strike, claiming that the new regulations oppressed Muslims. Fundamentalist Muslims, including those associated with the Zanzibari group Uamsho, continued to criticize secular Muslims who drank alcohol or married Christians. On Zanzibar, during Ramadan late in 2003, a group calling itself the "Lions of God" harassed women whom they considered to be dressed immodestly. Fundamentalist groups also have exhorted their followers to vote only for Muslim candidates, or to oppose the Prevention of Terrorism Law and Zanzibar's Mufti Law. Since independence, the Presidency has alternated between Christian mainlanders and Zanzibari Muslims. In widely reported remarks in 2003, President Mkapa, a Christian, reminded citizens that this was an informal arrangement, and not required by law, thereby signaling that the ruling CCM party might select a candidate who is not a Zanzibari Muslim.

During the period covered by this report, Muslim fundamentalist organizations engaged in increasingly confrontational proselytizing in Zanzibar, Morogoro, Mwanza, and Dar es Salaam. Anti-Christian slogans became more prevalent in newspapers and pamphlets, and on clothing. Muslims threatened tourist establishments in Zanzibar, warning proprietors who catered to Western customers that they risked retribution for serving alcohol or engaging in other perceived vices. On the mainland, Christian evangelical organizations also reportedly engaged in confrontational proselytizing, including the distribution of leaflets branding Muslims as "unbelievers" or "servants of Satan." In addition, Christian newspapers increasingly criticized Islamic practices and reprinted articles that were perceived to be anti-Muslim in spirit.

Religion has not served as a primary fault-line for sustained political violence and conflict; however, during the reporting period, societal violence based on religion occurred on occasion. In May, unknown perpetrators used human waste to desecrate a church on Zanzibar's Pemba Island. At the end of the period covered by this report, the perpetrators of these attacks were unknown, although many observers suspect that religious conflicts motivated the attacks. In April 2004, practitioners of traditional religion burned portions of a tourist hotel on Zanzibar because the proprietor refused to allow them to practice rituals that would purportedly rid the hotel of witches. In March, there was a series of bombings on Zanzibar's main island of Unguja, including one that targeted a vehicle belonging to a Christian parochial school, and one targeting the home of Zanzibar's mufti. A grenade was thrown into a crowded tourist restaurant; the grenade failed to explode and there were no injuries in this or in any of the other attacks. In October 2003, a Catholic church and church-owned vehicle were bombed on Zanzibar's Pemba island.

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; several urban Muslim leaders and many urban Muslims believe that the BAKWATA is a government-imposed watchdog organization. Christian and Muslim groups meet on an ad hoc basis, but efforts to establish a formal interdenominational council failed because of lack of agreement on by-laws for the body.

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. All agencies at the Embassy, including the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Peace Corps, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and

the Department of Defense, have assistance projects in largely Muslim areas such as Zanzibar and the coastal regions of the mainland. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy officials encouraged dialogue among religious groups on Zanzibar and called on all parties to avoid politicizing hostilities following incidents of violence, which were apparently religiously motivated.

In 2004, the newly appointed Secretary General of BAKWATA participated in an International Visitors Program on Civic Education; four other Muslim religious and political leaders participated in a variety of International Visitors Programs during the year. In June, the Embassy sponsored a speakers' program focusing on U.S. Middle East policy; a local Muslim advocacy group with an avid interest in the issue was invited to participate.

U.S. Embassy personnel 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 Iftar dinners during Ramadan, hosted by the Ambassador in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar. In 2003, the Embassy hosted its first-ever Eid-el-Fitr dinner to bring Christian and Muslim leaders together to celebrate the country's diversity and U.S. respect for Islam.

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 a total area of 21,925 square miles and its population is estimated officially at 4,970,000. The most recent available statistics, published by the Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2000, 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, 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. There is no state religion.

The Government recognizes seven Christian and three Islamic holidays as national holidays, including New Year, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, All Saints Day, Christmas, Tabaski, and End of 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 have to 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, 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 impor-

tantly, 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 of which most are smaller 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. For example, the Baptist Mission Hospital has been practicing in the country for more than 15 years but did not receive the Ministry of Interior's final authorization until 2001.

In 2003, 11 religious groups submitted applications to the Government requesting official recognition. The Muslim Union of Togo reports that since 1991, a total of 52 Islamic groups have 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.

In January, President Gnassingbe Eyadema, a Protestant, issued a public invitation to Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant religious leaders to attend the annual ecumenical prayer service commemorating the anniversary of his military takeover. Eyadema has invited these religious leaders to this "Day of National Liberation" service for at least 10 years. For the sixth consecutive year, the Catholic Church declined the invitation, stating that it is inappropriate to hold a worship service in a government building. In April, the Minister of Interior called for an ecumenical prayer service to bless political consultations between the country and the European Union. The Catholic Church declined to participate.

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, especially 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 Bap-

tist 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 Archbishop of Lome's Catholic Church 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 has criticized the Government for amending the Constitution and electoral code, and manipulating the National Election Commission.

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 many activities to inform the public about religious freedom in the United States, including sponsoring programs during International Education Week and Black History Month that featured discussions of religious diversity and tolerance in the United States. The U.S. 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 made arrangements for the director of the country's primary Muslim radio and television station, Jabal'Nour al Islamia, to visit the United States on a Volunteer Visitors Program. The Ambassador was a featured speaker on Radio Jabal'Nour al Islamia during Ramadan where he discussed religious tolerance in the United States. The U.S. Embassy coordinated these activities in order to strengthen the Muslim community's understanding of religious tolerance in the United States.

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. During the period covered by this report, no members of religious groups under suspicion of being "cults" were arrested or detained for illegal assembly or public nuisance.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were isolated cases of tension between Muslims and evangelical Christians over the issue of slaughtering animals for public sale during the period covered by this report. Unlike the previous year, the negative backlash from the Kanungu killings is no longer an issue, except in Kanungu District, where authorities closed one church suspected of "cult-like" activities.

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 a total area of 93,070 square miles, and its population is approximately 25 million. Christianity is the majority religion, and its adherents constitute approximately 75 percent of the population. Muslims account for approximately 15 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, make up approximately 10 percent of the population. Among the Christian groups, the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches claim approximately the same number of followers, accounting for approximately 90 percent of the country's professed Christians. 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 the country.

In many areas, particularly in rural settings, some religions tend to be syncretistic. Deeply held traditional indigenous beliefs commonly are blended into or ob-

served alongside the rites of recognized religions, particularly in areas that are predominantly Christian.

Missionary groups of several denominations are present and active in the country, including the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church, the Episcopal Church/Church of Uganda, the Church of Christ, and the Mormons.

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 indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious organizations, must register with the NGO Board, a division of the Interior Ministry that regulates and oversees NGO services. According to the NGO Registration Act (1989), failure to register is a criminal offense punishable by a fine of not less than $6 (10,000 shillings) and not exceeding $115 (200,000 shillings). Failure to pay such fine can result in the imprisonment of those responsible for the management of the organization, for up to a year.

A harsher new NGO Registration Amendment Bill that was introduced in 2001 remained under consideration by the Parliamentary Defense and Internal Affairs Committee. However, the bill has encountered significant opposition from civil society groups and several committee members, such that its enactment in its current form may be blocked.

In order 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 class of 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; 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 work 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 continued to refuse to grant registration to the World Last Message Warning Church, an apocalyptic group under suspicion following the 2000 killings of more than 1,000 citizens; however, there were no reports that the Government refused to grant such registration to any other religious organization.

The Political Parties and Organizations Act imposes restrictions on the registration and organization of political parties and organizations. It precludes the formation of such entities, if membership is based exclusively on sex, race, color, ethnic origin, tribal birth, creed, or religion. In a 2003 court ruling, parts of the act were declared unconstitutional and the Government subsequently decided not to appeal. The Government stated that it plans to introduce revised legislation in Parliament, but it did not do so during the period covered by this report.

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 September the Uganda Revenue Authority announced it would tax the religious institutions' surplus income not put to the common use of their congregations or to the good of society. Several religious leaders have protested this decision, which did not go into effect during the period covered by this report.

Permits are necessary for the construction of facilities, including religious facilities. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant such permits to any religious organization.

Private Koranic and Christian schools are common. In public schools, religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum covers world religions rather than instruction in one particular religion. There are also many private schools sponsored by religious groups that offer religious instruction according to the school's affiliation. These private 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 applicable to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually are released from work duties during the month of Ramadan.

Religious holidays 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 and protection of public morality. In August 2003, Masaka district officials asked the Chairman of the Masaka District Traditional Healers Association to close a traditional shrine belonging to Mawawu Kasozi. The estimated 50 nightly visitors to the shrine were allegedly required to disrobe, leading to district concerns about the morality of the institution's activities. In November 2003, police in Nebbi District temporarily closed a mosque during Eid-al-Fitr prayers, after reports of violence and of a person injured. Kanungu District officials reportedly closed a church in February, alleging similarities with a local "cult" group, Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, deemed responsible for the mass killing of its followers in 2000.

Seventy-six followers of Prophetess Nabaasa Gwajwa remain in custody following their May 2003 arrest outside police headquarters in Sembabule District. They were arrested for demonstrating against the police, after the police evicted the group from a worship center in Ntuusi village for failing to register with the Uganda Herbalists Association. In June 2003, the police released 128 protesters that were arrested.

In August 2003, Minister of State for Information Nsaba Buturo re-opened the Catholic Church-owned radio station Kyoga Veritas FM. Security forces closed the station in June 2003 for allegedly airing alarmist information about Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attacks in Soroti District.

There were no developments in an ongoing case in which local authorities closed a religious institution for forbidding members from seeking medical treatment. The leader and members of the religious group "Jurwo Ni Mungu" (Believers in God), who were arrested in March 2002 for unlawful assembly, are still in prison awaiting trial.

There were reports that local officials dispersed a meeting of a religious group during the period covered by this report; however, it appears the intervention was related to an intracongregational dispute. In July 2003, armed antiriot police in Mbarara District dispersed over 50 worshippers in a church building occupied by the Mbarara Christian Fellowship, at the request of one of the church pastors, who claimed breakaway members of the congregation were holding an illegal assembly. A leader of the breakaway group reportedly sued eight members of the main church for calling the police to disrupt their meeting. The case is currently before the High Court.

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, the police temporarily detained one pastor for leading an illegal nighttime assembly. In July 2003, police in Rukungiri District temporarily detained Pastor Johnson Mugisha, a minister at United Pentecostal Church, for conducting night prayers. Such prayers had been outlawed in Rukungiri District in 2000 for reasons of security.

There has been no government response to a February 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. Many Seventh-day Adventist students had reportedly missed exams held on Saturdays.

On March 18, armed gunmen at the Evangelical School of Technology in Yumbe District killed a missionary couple, Donna and Warren Pett, and a student, Isaac Juruga. Police initially arrested five persons suspected of participation in the murder. The motive for the killing 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, three suspects remained in custody with legal proceedings pending against them.

In April the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) asked the Uganda Human Rights Commission to investigate Father Carlos Rodriguez, a Spanish Catholic priest based in Gulu District, over allegations of involvement in clandestine activities helping the LRA. The UPDF reportedly also asked the Government to deport him for his alleged activities. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had taken no action against Rodriguez.

There were no developments in the case of the 12 followers of the Katula Kebise religious group arrested in March 2002 on charges of being disorderly.

There were reports that security forces harassed Muslims; however, the Government maintains that certain Muslim suspects were detained on charges of treason and terrorism, not on religious grounds. On March 25, antiterrorism police in Kampala arrested two Muslim religious leaders and five other suspects on treason charges. The Muslim religious leaders claim they were arrested for their religious beliefs, but the Government insists they were arrested for recruiting for the rebel

group Allied Democratic Forces. The men were in detention awaiting trial at the end of the reporting period.

During the period covered by this report, some previously arrested Muslims were released. In December 2003, nine Tabliq Muslims were acquitted of treason charges after spending a year in prison on remand. Also in December, 22 other Tabliqs being held on treason charges were released on bail.

The LRA is responsible for killing an estimated 120,000 persons in the past 17 years, kidnapping more than 25,000 children, attacking religious leaders, destroying and stealing church property, and causing more than 1.5 million persons to flee their homes and move to makeshift refugee 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 and provision of amnesty for rebels wishing to surrender.

The LRA attacked several Catholic and Anglican institutions in the northern part of the country. On June 12, 2003, LRA leader Joseph Kony reportedly ordered all his troops to target Catholic missions, nuns, and priests. However, during this reporting period, the number of specific LRA attacks against Catholic institutions significantly decreased from the last reporting period.

In July 2003, LRA rebels killed 3 persons and abducted 40 others during an attack on Aliwang Catholic Mission in Lira District.

In late July 2003, the UPDF reportedly recovered a LRA map of Catholic institutions in Katakwi District; however, there were no subsequent attacks on church facilities in the district.

On May 19, LRA rebels abducted the Anglican Bishop of Kitgum Diocese Benjamin Ojwang and six other persons from the bishop's home. The bishop was reportedly robbed and beaten with sticks before being freed along with the other captives by army forces.

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 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 isolated cases of tension between Muslims and evangelical Christians over the issue of slaughtering animals for public sale during the period covered by this report. Traditionally, public butchers in the country are Muslims who slaughter animals according to Islamic tradition. Recently, Christian groups have demanded the right to butcher and sell meat. Tensions over this issue resurfaced during July 2003; however, the matter was peacefully resolved through dialogue among religious leaders.

In April several Muslim leaders publicly complained of inflammatory comments made during a local language radio program concerning the prophet Muhammad.

During the period covered by this report, several religious alliances, including the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Inter-Religious Council, 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 used a Human Rights and Democracy Fund grant to sponsor a series of seminars promoting inter-religious harmony.

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. USAID and other development programs work with and through faith-based organizations to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict areas, to promulgate HIV/AIDS prevention messages, and to provide care and treatment for HIV-infected persons and their families.

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 a total 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 either 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, spread 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 parts of the country 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 citizens of Asian origin are Muslim, although Hindus constitute a sizable percentage. A small minority of indigenous persons is also Muslim.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country and include the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, a range of mainstream and evangelical churches, and the 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. Article 19 of the constitution guarantees 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. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Statutes provide effective remedies for the violation of religious freedom. These provisions are enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

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 and there were no reports that the Government provided preferential treatment to Christians.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas. The observance of these holidays does not negatively affect any religious group.

There are governmental controls that require the registration of religious groups. The Government approves all applications for registration from religious groups without discrimination. There were no reports that the Government rejected any religious groups that attempted to register or obtain licenses. To be eligible for registration, groups must exist, 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 in the

country under penalty of law. 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 experienced by other foreigners residing in Zambia.

The Government requires religious instruction in public schools. Such instruction is conducted in the dominant Christian religion and students from other faiths are usually excused from religious instruction. Religious instruction in Islam and other faiths 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.

The Oasis Forum—composed of the Law Association of Zambia, NGO Coordinating Committee, Zambia Episcopal Conference, Christian Council of Zambia, and 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 from government officials against church leaders for taking a stand on political issues, the churches continued to freely and vocally criticize the Government, organize activities, and mobilize public opinion.

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 July 2003, police in Lusaka raided an Islamic school and arrested the operators for unlawful confinement and child abuse; boys between the ages of 4 and 10 endured harsh conditions while studying Arabic and Islam at the school. The following week, police raided two similar Islamic schools in the Lusaka area. In November 2003, the Director of Public Prosecutions dropped the original charges, although new charges of interfering with justice were lodged. The High Court subsequently ordered the deportation of one of the operators. An appeal of the deportation order was pending in May.

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

On February 3, Zambian President Mwanawasa spoke at the Makeni Islamic Community's Eid-Al-Adha celebration. Mwanawasa urged the Muslim community to participate actively in the country's economic and political life, reiterated that all religions are welcome in the country, and stressed that the Constitution provides for freedom of worship.

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 inter-religious dialogue and collaboration on issues such as HIV/AIDS. The Ambassador appeared on national television on numerous occasions with religious leaders and met frequently with leaders of the Muslim community. The Ambassador also participated in a march with a large interdenominational group, organized by members of the Seventh Day Adventist church, to rally support for the fight against HIV–AIDS. In addition, the

U.S. Government hosted a local Islamic scholar during a 3-week International Visitors Program.

ZIMBABWE

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 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, as in previous years, the Government was critical of and harassed religious leaders who spoke out against the Government's ongoing campaign of violent intimidation against opposition supporters. Church leaders and members who criticized the Government faced arrest and detention.

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 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 in the country. The evangelical denominations, mostly Pentecostal churches and Apostolic groups, are the fastest growing religious groups in the country. They appeal to large numbers of disillusioned members from the established churches who reportedly are attracted by promises of miracles and messages of hope at a time of political, social and economic instability. The country's small Muslim population is estimated at 1 percent. The remainder of the population consists of practitioners of Greek Orthodoxy, Judaism, and 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.

Many persons identify with the Christian denomination that has had the longest historical connection to their area. President Robert Mugabe is a Roman Catholic who professes to practice his faith actively, and many of those who make up the elite of society 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), migrants from other southern and eastern African countries (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, and there are a number of mosques in rural areas. There are 18 mosques in the capital Harare and 8 in Bulawayo. The Muslim community, influenced by the Council of Imaams (Majlis-il-Ulamas), generally has been somewhat insular; however, in the past several years, the Islamic community has expanded its outreach efforts with the aid of the Kuwaiti-sponsored African Muslim Agency (AMA). Notwithstanding budget constraints in recent years, 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.

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 (ZAOG, a separate organization from the Assemblies of God Church, which also exists in the country), continue to adhere strictly to Christian beliefs; in fact, they 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 latter groups tend to be centered on a prophetic figure, with members of the congregation identifying themselves as "apostles." These church members wear long white robes and head coverings. 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 mis-

sionary churches, and some of their teachings incorporated what has become known as "black consciousness." These churches grew out of the Christian churches' decision not to incorporate traditional African culture and religion. These local churches have proliferated as a result of splits among the followers of the different "prophets."

Many persons continue to believe, in 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. Belief in traditional healers spans both the rural and urban areas. Traditional healers are very common and are licensed and regulated by the Zimbabwe National African Traditional Healers' Association (ZINATHA).

Foreign missionaries operated in the country, 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. 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 those areas. 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 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. The Christian schools constitute one-third of the schools in the country, with the Catholic Church having the majority. In addition, there are several institutions of higher education that include religious studies as a core component of the curriculum.

Christian missions provided the first hospitals to care for black citizens. During the reporting period, there were 126 hospitals and clinics in the country that fell under the Zimbabwe Association of Church Related Hospitals (ZACH), an association that consists largely of mainstream Christian churches. The individual churches are the predominant source of funding for maintaining these hospitals because of the Government's increasing inability to provide essential services. The Government provides small subsidies to cover some hospital drugs and staff salaries, but these make up only a small percentage of the hospitals' operating budgets.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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-third of the adult population, and affordable science-based medicines effective in treating HIV/AIDS have remained unavailable.

The Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA) criminalizes purporting to practice witchcraft, accusing persons of practicing witchcraft, hunting witches, and soliciting persons to name witches. Penalties include imprisonment for up to 7 years. The law defines witchcraft as "the use of charms and any other means or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery," and provides punishments for intending to cause disease or injury to any person or animal through the use of witchcraft. Since 1997 ZINATHA has proposed amendments to the law that would redefine witchcraft only as the practice of sorcery with the intent to cause harm, including illness, injury, or death; however, mainstream Christian churches reportedly have opposed such legislation. Human rights groups also generally supported the existing WSA. The Act 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. In March 2002, the Traditional

Medical Practitioners Council, formed from members of ZINATHA to oversee traditional healers, called for amendments to the WSA that would authenticate the existence of witches and wizards and remove penalties for accusing persons of practicing witchcraft.

There was some tension between the Government and some indigenous African churches because of the latter's preference for prayer over science-based medical practices that resulted in the reduction of avoidable childhood diseases and deaths in those communities. Some members of the 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), despite a broadcasting law passed in 2001 that permits one independent television broadcaster, but imposes stringent licensing requirements. 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, approached the advisory board about obtaining access to airtime. The chairman of the Religious Advisory Board believes that Muslims represent too small a percentage of society to take up minimal religious airtime or to merit membership on the advisory board. Other evangelical church groups were more hostile to Islam and were unlikely to support the inclusion of Islamic programming in the already limited religious broadcasting block. However, during the period covered by this report, Muslims occasionally were allowed to conduct the daily opening prayer on ZBC.

In the last few years, due to inadequate resources, the Government returned several former church schools that it had taken over at independence to their respective churches. The Government returned nearly all of the secondary schools and a few of the primary schools that it seized from the churches after independence. Most former church schools remaining under government control were used as primary schools in the rural areas.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, church leaders and members who criticized the Government continued to face threats, arrests and detention by government officials. The Government and government supporters targeted some clergymen because they strongly criticized the state-sanctioned, politically motivated crimes and violence during the period prior to the 2000 parliamentary elections and the March 2002 presidential election, and urged the Government to restore peace in the country (see Section III).

In March, Reverend Noel Scott, a Northern Ireland clergyman who has been a missionary in Bulawayo for more than thirty 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.

In March, 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.

On January 1, police arrested and detained Father Nigel Johnson, Station Manager for Radio Dialogue, while Johnson filmed footage of a local dance group in the Bulawayo high-density suburb of Nkulamane. The police detained Johnson overnight and charged him with violating the Miscellaneous Offenses Act and with homicide. On March 25 and 26, police raided and searched Radio Dialogue's offices and detained two other staff members for questioning. All detainees were released.

In June 2003, Police in Masvingo questioned and detained Church of Christ preacher Sonykis Chimbuya over alleged anti-government prayers. Police ordered Chimbuya to desist from saying prayers that would have a political message. Chimbuya was released without charge the same day.

In February 2003, police harassed, arrested, and detained 19 pastors as they attempted to deliver a petition against the misuse of police power to Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri. The pastors were released the same day.

In February 2003, police arrested and detained a blind Roman Catholic nun in Harare along with 37 other women for participating in a Valentine's Day March for Peace sponsored by Women of Zimbabwe Arise! (WOZA). Police also beat and arrested a priest, Father Nigel Johnson, for filming a similar march on the same day in Bulawayo. Police arrested 14 participants in the latter march. All arrestees from both marches were released the same day.

In February 2003, police prevented a public meeting at the Northside Community Church in Harare, which was supposed to address churches' roles in the country's political crisis. Police arrested the president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Bishop Trevor Manhanga, along with seven other people and detained them for several hours.

In May 2002, local government minister Ignatius Chombo prompted war veterans in Binga district, Matabeleland North province, to close down the food distribution efforts of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), which was the only source of food for many rural residents in the Binga district. Chombo criticized the CCJP for establishing local structures parallel to the Government's structures. In early 2004, the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement announced that the country did not need any more food and notified CCJP and other distributing organizations to scale down their food assistance throughout the country.

In February 2002, police arrested Father Kevin O'Doherty and eight others participating in a prayer processional to police headquarters in Bulawayo. They were charged with contravening the newly passed Public Order and Security Act, but the charges were dropped later.

Following Archbishop Pius Ncube's remarks during the 2002 presidential election campaign criticizing the Government's violent campaign tactics, the state-controlled daily newspaper in Bulawayo printed false accusations against Ncube, including that he distributed sexually explicit material to prisoners. At a campaign rally in February 2002, President Mugabe claimed Ncube had "political tentacles" and supported the opposition after the Archbishop resisted government attempts to take over the Catholic-run St. Luke's hospital. During the period covered by this report, Ncube reportedly received threats and intimidating visits by officers suspected to be from the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO).

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 competition with Christian denominations for converts. Catholic Church officials say that they welcome interfaith dialogue with Muslims.

There are at least four umbrella religious organizations primarily focused on interdenominational dialogue among Christians and other inter-religious activities. Muslims are not represented in any of these organizations, and there is no vehicle for formal Christian-Muslim dialogue; however, informal dialogue occurs from time to time. A few Muslims have complained of discrimination by private employers who refuse to allow them sufficient time to worship at their mosques on Fridays. In August 2003, the Islamic Convent of the Strict Observance (ICSO) complained to the Ministry of Education that the Lord's Prayer in the school curriculum contravened section 19 of the Constitution, which protects freedom of conscience. ICSO later withdrew the complaint.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) is an umbrella organization of all non-Catholic ecumenical Christian missionary churches, except for evangelical organizations. It maintains a secretariat in Harare, conducts development programs, has a Justice and Peace desk, and collaborates with the much older CCJP. The Catholic Church and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference have observer status within the ZCC, and relations generally are cooperative. Some members of the Christian

community are hesitant to support Catholics joining the ZCC because of memories of the inability of religious leaders to work together during the liberation war era, and they fear a repeat of that experience. 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 Catholic and other 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 and includes the Catholic Church, which operates a significant number of the rural hospitals and schools in the country. The HOD has a loose structure and no office. The HOD's secretarial support is provided by the general secretariat of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), and its secretary general holds the same position in the ZCBC. The education secretaries of the various churches work together under the HOD, as does the religious advisory board to the ZBC. This 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 across the country. 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.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) is an umbrella organization of loosely affiliated evangelical churches that was established in the early 1980s. The fellowship has observer status with the HOD but in general does not work closely with either the ZCC or the Catholic Church.

During the period covered by this report, the ZCC, ZCBC, EFZ, and South African churches and clergy called for talks of political reconciliation between the ruling and opposition parties, to resume their leadership of the country and to promote a spirit of tolerance. These organizations issued public statements strongly critical of the Government for its campaign of violent intimidation against opposition supporters, its campaign to politicize food distribution, its corruption, and its failure to guide the country out of crisis. Privately, the leaders of those organizations lamented that the Government prevented them from using existing regional church structures to import and distribute food aid in the midst of a famine.

Several key church leaders and organizations strongly criticized the state-sanctioned, politically motivated crimes and violence during the period before and after the March 2002 presidential election and urged the Government to restore peace in the country. Since the 2000 parliamentary elections, church groups throughout the country gradually have become more vocal in their criticism of the Government for the continuation of politically motivated violence.

In a 2001 address to regional Catholic bishops, President Mugabe stated that the Roman Catholic Church should support the Government's land acquisition program and criticized it for "equivocating in the face of racial injustice." In January 2002, Zimbabwe Council of Churches General-Secretary Denison Mafinyane severely criticized the Government for unleashing a "reign of terror" against innocent citizens. In a May 2002 address to the 10th Synod session of the Anglican Diocese of Manicaland, Bishop Sebastian Bakare criticized politicians who say there is peace in the country while citizens continue to suffer from political violence at the hands of ruling party supporters.

In 2001, the Government bypassed canonical law to install Norbert Kunonga, a staunch Mugabe supporter, as Anglican Bishop of Harare. Other priests reportedly have left the diocese because of Kunonga's sermons praising Mugabe and his policies. In August 2003, Anglican parishioners confronted Bishop Kunonga with a signed petition and detained him briefly, accusing him of misusing church funds. In October 2003, Kunonga seized a formerly white-owned farm ten miles from Harare and evicted fifty black workers to make way for his own staff.

In late February 2002, ZANU–PF supporters beat three Catholic priests, two Catholic nuns, and a Catholic brother in Zaka after they met with U.S. officials. The perpetrators accused the religious figures of being opposition supporters because of their meeting with U.S. diplomats. Although local ruling party officials later apologized to the victims, the perpetrators were not charged with any crime.

Several prominent evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Protestant bishops collaborated in an attempt to bring the ruling and opposition parties back to the negoti-

ating table to restart dialogue aimed at resolving the country's political crisis during the period covered by this report. In September 2003, the ruling party threatened the bishops to keep their efforts quiet or it would not cooperate in the effort to restart negotiations.

Fambidzano, which means "walking together," is a relatively new grouping of indigenous churches. A South African Dutch Reformed Church theologian and social anthropologist, Inus Daneel, who has researched these churches in South Africa and the country, founded the organization in the mid-1970s. Fambidzano was created to give the leaders of these churches more theological and biblical education, according to Daneel. 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. In 2002, ZINATHA members formed the Traditional Medical Practitioners Council to certify and oversee traditional healers.

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 are growing 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 (See Section II).

There were two reports of possible ritual murders associated with traditional religious practices during the period covered by this report. 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 six-year-old girl with several body parts missing, who was found in July, a week after she was reported missing. Police suspected that both were murdered for ritual purposes. The Government generally enforces the law against murder in the case of ritual murders. 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

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 further supports religious and other constitutionally protected freedoms through demarches to the Government; nondenominational financial support for community development projects, which often are associated with religious institutions; and regular dialogue with and support for 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 a total 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 the European settlement of the country, aboriginal inhabitants followed animistic religions, involving belief in spirits behind the forces of nature and the influence of ancestral spirit beings. Aboriginal beliefs and spirituality, even among Aborigines who identify themselves as members of a traditional organized religion, are intrinsically linked to the land generally and to certain sites of significance in particular. According to the 2001 census, 5,244 persons, or less than 0.03 percent of respondents, reported practicing aboriginal traditional religions, 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 also expanded the ethnic diversity of existing Christian denominations. Between 1996 and 2001, the number of Buddhists increased from 199,812 to 357,813 persons, while the number of Muslims increased from 200,885 to 281,578 persons. The number of Jews grew from 79,800 to 84,000 persons, and Hindus from 67,300 to 95,500 persons. 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. It is not the source of a personal right

to practice religion freely. The bar does not apply to the legislative powers of the states.

Religious adherents who have suffered religious discrimination may have recourse under federal discrimination laws. However, in 1998 a review by the independent federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) found that the federal laws did not adequately meet the country's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the HREOC recommended that the Government enact a federal religious freedom act. In 2002, the Government refused to enact a religious freedom act.

The Human Rights Commissioner may inquire into allegations of systematic discrimination on religious grounds by the Federal Government and, if such allegations are substantiated, report to Parliament. Under the provisions of the Federal Racial Discrimination Act, the HREOC may also mediate a complaint when a plaintiff's religious affiliation is considered tantamount to membership in an ethnic group. In the 12 months prior to June 30, 2003, the Commission received 16 employment-related complaints 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 prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion. A provision of the Federal Constitution precludes the adoption of a state religion. In addition all jurisdictions, apart from South Australia, have established independent agencies to mediate allegations of religious discrimination.

Minority religions generally are given equal rights to land, status, and the building of places of worship. However, in recent years a number of regional councils have refused their local Muslim and Buddhist communities planning permits to construct places of worship. Those communities appealed the councils' decisions to the courts for review.

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 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. 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.

The HREOC's 1998 report on religious freedom stated, "despite the legal protections that apply in different jurisdictions, many citizens suffer discrimination on the basis of religious belief or nonbelief, including members of both mainstream and nonmainstream religions, and those of no religious persuasion." Many non-Christian adherents have complained to the HREOC that the dominance of traditional Christianity in civic life has the potential to marginalize large numbers of citizens. However, the complainants have not presented any concrete evidence of such marginalization. Persons who suffer discrimination on the basis of religion may resort to the court system, which is an effective method of obtaining redress.

Following increased reports of threats of violence and vandalism against religious property, between March and December 2003 HREOC undertook a project called Isma involving national consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and

Muslim citizens. The HREOC released its Isma report on June 16. Instead of answering the question of whether Muslim and Arab citizens shared a common ethnic origin or race, which would entitle them to protection under the racial definition of the existing federal anti-discrimination laws, the report called on the Government to enact laws that prohibit religious discrimination and vilification (repeating a recommendation in its 1998 Report on Religious Freedom). The report also recommended that police services review their systems for recording incidents motivated by racial or religious prejudice to ensure greater consistency in the collection of data across the country, and that police services ensure that all victims whose cases do not meet the police's investigation threshold are referred to an appropriate community or human rights body.

In February, the Federal Parliament condemned racism against the Jewish community following publication of an Executive Council of Australian Jewry report that noted a large increase in anti-Semitic attacks. In 2003, the Council recorded 481 incidents, which ranged from physical violence and property damage (36 reports) to anti-Semitic material (252 reports), compared to an annual average in the past of 279 incidents.

In October 2003, the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) filed a civil complaint against two persons associated with Catch the Fire, a Christian group, with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal under the state's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act of 2001. The ICV alleged that the two persons vilified Muslims during their speeches at a 2002 seminar on Islam sponsored by Catch the Fire and sought an apology, a retraction of the comments in question, and compensation. Lawyers for the defendants argued that the complaint was outside the tribunal's jurisdiction, asserting that the Victorian act infringed on the constitutional right of freedom of expression. The tribunal's decision was still pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Following the terrorist attack in Bali in October 2002 and again following the start of military operations in Iraq in March 2003, reports of threats of violence and vandalism against religious properties in all state and territory capital cities increased and subsequently decreased. Government and religious leaders continued to call for tolerance 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.

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

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 some 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 the Islamic faith 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 all religions other than official Islam. In September 2003, the Government detained several Muslims for attempting to revive the radical Al-Arqam movement, previously banned in 1995. The Government did not release the names of the detainees, and they were still in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

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

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 a total area of approximately 2,200 square miles, and its resident population is approximately 360,000. The Government does not publish detailed data on religious affiliation; however, other sources indicate that 67 percent of the population is Muslim, 13 percent is Buddhist, 10 percent is Christian, and another 10 percent adheres to indigenous beliefs or other faiths. Approximately 20 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 Chinese temples, and 2 Hindu temples 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 some restrictions on non-Islamic religions. The official religion is Islam as practiced by the Shafeite School, and non-Shafeite practices are restricted.

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

Religious organizations other than those specifically mentioned in the Constitution are required to register with the Government, as are commercial and nonreligious organizations, under the Societies Act. An organization that fails to register can face charges of unlawful assembly, and its members can be arrested and imprisoned, as well as incur financial penalties.

While the country has several Chinese temples, only one, 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

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.

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

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

A 1964 fatwa issued by the State Mufti, which strongly discourages Muslims from assisting non-Muslim organizations in perpetuating their faiths, 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, two Christian churches and their associated schools have been allowed,

on safety grounds, 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 may not organize processions outside the bounds of its half-acre site. Christian organizations are subjected to the same restrictions on processions. In the first 6 months of 2004, the Government appeared more tolerant of celebrations to mark the Chinese Lunar New Year, allowing more dragon dances and other New Year festivities that it had previously discouraged.

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

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

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

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, expected to be completed by the end of 2004. The authorities have begun enforcing Shari'a regulations, such as arresting 46 Muslims in April for not performing Friday prayers. Thirty-two of those arrested were foreigners working in the country. The offenders were fined and later released. There was a marked increase in the number of arrests for other offenses under Shari'a law, such as "khalwat" and consumption of alcohol. The arresting forces in these crackdowns on errant Muslims are comprised of civilian police and religious enforcers.

Religious authorities regularly participate in raids to confiscate alcoholic beverages and non-halal meats. They also monitor restaurants and supermarkets to ensure conformity with halal practice. Restaurants and service employees that serve a Muslim in daylight hours during the fasting month are subject to fines.

The Ministry of Education requires courses on Islam or the MIB in all schools. It prohibits the teaching of other religions. In January 2002, the Islamic Education Department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs was transferred to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry requires that all students, including non-Muslims, follow a course of study on the Islamic faith and learn the jawi (Arabic script). The International School of Brunei and the Jerudong International School are exempt from these restrictions. Private mission schools are not allowed to give Christian instruction and are required to give instruction about Islam; however, the Government does not prohibit or restrict parents from giving religious instruction to children in their own homes. In January, under its integrated education plan to combine religious and academic education, the Ministry of Education introduced a pilot scheme in 38 government primary schools that requires the compulsory study of Arabic by all students.

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

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

In July 1999, a new Married Women's Law came into effect, improving significantly the rights of non-Muslim married women with respect to maintenance, property, and domestic violence. A November 1999 revision of the Islamic Family Law, regarding women's position in marriage and divorce, also strengthened the marital rights of Muslim women. In 2003, Muslim women's rights in divorce, outlined in the 1999 order with respect to property and maintenance, were further reinforced allowing women to sue ex-husbands in Shari'a Court for half of marital property. The court can also garnish salaries of ex-husbands who refuse to pay maintenance.

Muslims who wish to change or renounce their religion face considerable difficulties. Those born Muslim face official and societal pressure not to leave Islam. Permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs must be obtained, and there were no reports of anyone requesting such permission. There were instances during the period covered by this report of persons, often foreign women, who converted to Islam

as a prelude to marrying Muslims (as required by the country's Islamic law). If the marriages took place, these women faced intense official pressure not to return to their former religions, or were faced with extraordinary delays in obtaining permission to do so. There are also known cases of divorced Muslim converts who, because of official and societal pressure, remain officially Muslim although they would prefer to revert to their former faiths.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In general those adhering to faiths other than Islam are allowed to practice their beliefs, provided that they exercise restraint and do not proselytize. Those non-Muslims who proselytize have in the past been arrested or detained and sometimes held without charges for extended periods of time. Agents of the Internal Security Department monitor religious services at Christian churches, and senior church members believe that they are under intermittent surveillance.

In September 2003, the Government used the Internal Security Act to detain six members of the banned radical Al-Arquam 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 still in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

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

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 2002 of teenaged children who resisted 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The country's national philosophy, the Melayu Islam Beraja concept, discourages open-mindedness to religions other than Islam, and there are no programs to promote understanding of other religions. The country's indigenous people generally convert either to Islam or Christianity but rarely to Buddhism. More than 100 indigenous persons converted to Christianity during the period covered by this report, while a larger number converted to Islam. Consequently, Muslim officials view Christianity as the main rival to official Islam. There is no reported dialogue between government officials and their Christian and Buddhist counterparts.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy has increased contacts with all religious officials and in dialogues with government officials. Embassy representatives continue to press the Government to adhere to the spirit of its Constitution and its declarations on human rights. The Embassy is developing public diplomacy programs to increase the level of interaction with Bruneians on religious freedom issues.

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. Although there is currently no constitution in place, the principles laid out by the Government for its reconvened constitutional convention allow for "freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practice religion subject to public order, morality, or health." 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. Through its pervasive internal security apparatus, the Government generally infiltrated or monitored the meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. It systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom, discouraged or prohibited minority religions from constructing new places of worship, and in some ethnic minority areas coercively promoted Buddhism over other religions, particularly among members of the minority ethnic groups. Under the principles that are to guide the drafting of the constitution, "the State recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the State." Christian groups continued to experience difficulties in obtaining permission to repair existing churches or build new ones in most regions, while Muslims reported that they essentially are banned from constructing any new mosques or expanding existing ones anywhere in the country. Anti-Muslim violence continued to occur during the period covered by this report, as did monitoring of Muslims' activities and restrictions on Muslim travel and worship countrywide.

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. There is widespread prejudice against Burmese 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, scholars, diplomats of other governments, and international business and media representatives. Embassy staff 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.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 261,970 square miles, and its population is approximately 50 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 persons (roughly 3-percent of the male Buddhist population) and depend on the laity for their material needs, including clothing and daily donations of food. There is a much smaller number of Buddhist nuns. There are Christian minorities (mostly Baptists as well as some Catholics and Anglicans), Muslims (mostly Sunni), Hindus, and practitioners of traditional Chinese and indigenous religions. According to official statistics, almost 90 percent of the population practices Buddhism, 4 percent practices Christianity, and 4 percent practices Islam; however, these statistics 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—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, during the period covered by this report there was neither a congregation nor a rabbi to conduct services.

The country is ethnically diverse, and there is some correlation between ethnicity and religion. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion among the majority Burman ethnic group and among the Shan, 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. Hinduism is practiced chiefly by the Indian population, who are concentrated in major cities and in the south-central region, although some Indians are Catholic. Islam is practiced

widely in Arakan State, where it is the dominant religion of the Rohingya minority, and in Irrawaddy Division, as well as among some 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, and practices drawn from those indigenous religions persist widely in popular Buddhist rituals, especially in rural areas.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The country has been ruled since 1962 by highly authoritarian military regimes. The latest military Government, now called the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has governed without a constitution or legislature since 1988. Under the principles that will guide the drafting of the constitution at the reconvened constitutional convention, there is "freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practice religion subject to public order, morality or health." 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 ceasefire agreements with most armed ethnic groups since 1989, active Shan, Karen, and Karenni insurgencies continued during the period covered by this report. Peace talks between the Government and the leading Karen insurgent group, the Karen National Union (KNU), began in December 2003 and led to a temporary cease-fire, which was still being observed at the end of the period covered by this report. 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. Under the principles expected to guide the drafting of the constitution, "the State recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the State." Successive governments, civilian and military, have supported and associated themselves conspicuously with Buddhism.

Virtually all organizations, religious or otherwise, must be registered with the Government. A government directive exempts "genuine" religious organizations from registration; however, in practice only registered organizations can buy or sell property or open bank accounts; 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 also provides some utility services, such as electricity, at preferential rates to recognized religious organizations.

Buddhist doctrine remained part of the state-mandated curriculum in all elementary schools. 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 also funded two state universities to train Buddhist monks and one university intended to teach non-citizens 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. In 1998, the Government announced plans to build a new multireligion square on some of the land that it recovered in 1997 by relocating Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim cemeteries in Rangoon's Kyandaw neighborhood. The project had been on hold since 2001, when the Government objected to the inclusion of a cross in the design of a proposed Christian monument at the site. In 2003, the Government issued verbal permission for the site to be constructed, but without the cross.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to show its preference for Theravada Buddhism and to control the organization and restrict the activities and expression of the monkhood ("sangha"), although some monks have resisted such control. Beginning in late 1990, the Government banned any organization of Buddhist monks other than the nine state-recognized monastic orders. These nine orders submit to the authority of a state-sponsored State Monk Coordination Committee ("Sangha Maha Nayaka

Committee," or SMNC), which is elected indirectly by monks. The junta also authorized military commanders to try Buddhist monks before military tribunals for "activities inconsistent with and detrimental to Buddhism," and it imposed on Buddhist monks a code of conduct. Infractions of the code are punished by immediate, public defrocking, and often criminal penalties. In November 2001, two nuns at Thayet were arrested and sentenced to 7 years in prison for violating this code.

In January 2003, three nuns were arrested under the 1950 Emergency Provision Act for demonstrating in Rangoon for lower prices on basic commodities, progress in political dialogue, and the release of political prisoners. They were defrocked and sentenced to at least 7 years in prison.

Since the early 1990s, the junta increasingly has made special efforts to link itself with Buddhism as a means of boosting its own legitimacy. State-controlled news media frequently depicted or described government officials paying homage to Buddhist monks; making donations at pagodas throughout the country; officiating at ceremonies to open, improve, restore, or maintain pagodas; and organizing ostensibly voluntary "people's donations" of money, food, and uncompensated labor to build or refurbish Buddhist religious shrines throughout the country. State-owned newspapers routinely featured, as front-page banner slogans, quotations from the Buddhist scriptures. The Government has published books of Buddhist religious instruction. The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a government-sponsored mass organization in which participation often is not entirely voluntary, has organized courses in Buddhist culture attended by millions of persons, according to state-owned media reports. Authorities defrocked and arrested a group of 26 monks in December 2003 and sentenced them in February to jail terms ranging from 7 to 16 years for refusing to accept government donations of robes and other items.

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

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

The Government continued to discriminate against members of minority religions, restricting their educational, proselytizing, and church-building activities.

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

In general the Government has not allowed permanent foreign religious missions to operate in the country since the mid-1960s, when it expelled nearly all foreign missionaries and nationalized all private schools and hospitals, which were extensive and were affiliated mostly with Christian religious organizations. The Government is not known to have paid any compensation in connection with these extensive confiscations. The Government has allowed a few elderly Catholic priests and

nuns who worked in the country prior to independence to continue their work. At times religious groups, including Catholics, 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 established before 1962 also continued to operate; however, in 2000 military authorities closed a Bible school that had been operating in Tamu Township in Sagaing Division since 1976.

Christian groups continued to experience difficulties in obtaining permission to repair existing churches or build new ones in most regions. 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. Authorities reportedly destroy any 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. The Government reportedly also has denied permission for churches to be built on main roads in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. In Rangoon authorities have instructed various Christian groups to call their places of worship "social centers" rather than churches. One source estimated that the Government approves construction of only approximately 10 to 15 new churches per year. The Religious Affairs Ministry argued that permission to 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.

Since the 1960s, Christian and Islamic groups have had difficulties importing religious literature into the country. All publications, religious and secular, remain subject to control and censorship. Translations of the Bible into indigenous languages cannot be imported legally; however, Bibles could be printed locally in indigenous languages with government permission—often difficult to obtain. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of the confiscation of Bibles or other religious materials. In 2002, the German-based company Good Books for All was allowed to distribute 10,000 Bibles in the country. One religious group reported that in 2001 it had received government permission to import 2,000 English-language Bibles, the first such import allowed in 20 years. The Bibles were not imported, however, and in May 2002, the Government reversed its earlier decision. Bibles continued to be smuggled into the country.

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

The Government allowed members of all religious groups to establish and maintain links with coreligionists in other countries and to travel abroad for religious purposes, subject to restrictive passport and visa issuance practices, foreign exchange controls, and government monitoring that 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.

Religious affiliation and ethnic background are indicated on government-issued identification cards that citizens and permanent residents of the country are required to carry at all times. Having "Muslim" or "Bengali" 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 (a Baptist). There were no non-Buddhists who held flag rank in the armed forces. The Government discouraged Muslims from entering military service, and Christian or Muslim military officers who aspired to promotion beyond middle ranks were encouraged by their superiors to convert to Buddhism.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Government restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and movement, including diplomatic travel, make it difficult to obtain timely and accurate information on human rights in 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 military has 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.

Government security forces and the USDA continued to take actions against Christian groups, arresting clergy, destroying churches, and prohibiting religious services. 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 Rangoon during 2001, authorities closed more than 80 house churches because they did not have proper authorization to hold religious meetings. These closures continued in Rangoon and elsewhere throughout the period covered by this report, although numbers are not known. At the same time, the authorities made it difficult, though not impossible, to obtain approval for the construction of "authorized" churches.

Authorities have attempted to prevent Chin Christians from practicing their religion. Since the early 1990s, security forces have torn down or forced villagers to tear down crosses that had been erected outside Chin Christian villages. These crosses often have been replaced with pagodas, sometimes built with forced labor.

The authorities reportedly subjected Christian sermons to censorship and repeatedly prohibited Christian clergy from proselytizing. In April 2002, two Chin pastors—Reverend That Ci and his son-in-law Reverend Lian Za Da—and their families reportedly were arrested in a suburb of Rangoon for having unregistered overnight guests in their home. However, Reverend That Ci had filed the necessary paperwork and had not received a reply. The arrests reportedly were an effort to force them to stop proselytizing so openly in the Dagon North area. When they refused, they were sent from Dagon North police station to Insein prison. The pastors and their families reportedly have been released from prison.

The Government attempted to coerce members of the Chin ethnic minority to convert to Buddhism and prevented Christian Chin from proselytizing by, among other things, arresting and physically abusing Christian clergy and destroying churches. Until 1990, the Chin generally practiced either Christianity or traditional indigenous religions with little interference from the Government. Since 1990, the Govern-

ment has supported forced conversions of Christians to Buddhism. The majority of Chins, however, are still Christian. This campaign, reportedly accompanied by other efforts to "Burmanize" the Chin, has involved a large increase in military units stationed in Chin State and other predominately Chin areas, state-sponsored immigration of Buddhist Burman monks from other regions, and construction of Buddhist monasteries and shrines in Chin communities with few or no Buddhists, often by means of forced "donations" of money or labor. Local government officials promised monthly support payments to individuals and households who converted to Buddhism. Government soldiers stationed in Chin State reportedly were given higher rank and pay if they married Chin women and converted them to Buddhism. The authorities reportedly supplied rice to Buddhists at lower prices than to Christians, distributed extra supplies of food to Buddhists on Sunday mornings while Christians attended church, and exempted converts to Buddhism from forced labor. Chin leaders reported that in December 2003, during a visit to Chin State of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, primary- and middle-school Christian children were forced to perform a Buddhist ritual in his honor. While it could not be independently verified, the Chin Human Rights Organization also reported the January 2003 escape of five Chin children who had been forcibly placed in a Buddhist monastery in Matupi Township.

In 2001, there were credible reports that in Karen State's Pa'an township, army units repeatedly conscripted as porters young men leaving Sunday worship services at some Christian churches, causing young men to avoid church attendance. Soldiers led by officers repeatedly disrupted Christian worship services and celebrations.

There were credible reports that SPDC authorities systematically repressed and relocated Muslims to isolate them in certain areas. For example, Muslims in Arakan State were forced to donate time, money, and materials toward buildings for the Buddhist community. Certain townships in the Arakan State, such as Thandwe, Gwa, and Taung-gut, were declared "Muslim-free zones" by government decree in 1983. 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 last 2 years, local authorities in Arakan State scheduled approximately 40 mosques for destruction, including some in the state capital Sittwe, because they were reportedly built without permission. There were other such allegations in Rangoon Division and Karen State. Thirteen mosques were destroyed in Arakan before the authorities desisted at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Over the past year, the Government gave written permission to repair existing mosques in some areas. However, to ensure that destroyed mosques are not rebuilt, they have been replaced with government-owned buildings, monasteries, and Buddhist temples.

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 July 2003, anti-Muslim violence flared briefly in Pyinmana, about 175 miles north of Rangoon, when a Muslim food stall owner refused to sell food to the friend of a Buddhist monk. The police regained control, but damage was done to Muslim homes and shops.

From October to December 2003, there were several violent clashes between Buddhists and Muslims in the Mandalay area and in Rangoon. In Kyaukse, near Mandalay in the central part of the country, a mob led by Buddhist monks attacked Muslim homes and mosques following an alleged attack by Muslim youth on monks reciting sutras to commemorate the end of Buddhist Lent. One week later, also in Kyaukse, another Buddhist mob attacked Muslim homes and mosques, killing at least 10 Muslims. Authorities managed to keep the anti-Muslim violence from spreading to nearby Mandalay. In November 2003, troops reportedly fired on monks protesting the arrest of a local abbot and killed two of them.

In late October 2003, Buddhist monks and local civilians in Rangoon attacked Muslim shops and homes over several nights in two predominately Muslim neighborhoods. Three Muslim shop owners were beaten badly by the mobs.

Though there was little violence in Rangoon and Mandalay after November 2003, there were unverified reports of attacks in November on a mosque and attached madrassa in Maungdaw, northern Arakan State.

While there is no direct evidence linking the Government to these violent acts against Muslims, Muslim leaders and non-Muslim local residents insisted that the instigators were affiliated with the Government. In both Kyaukse and Rangoon, witnesses claimed that many of the 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 re-

lations 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 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. To date the reconstruction has not occurred because most Muslims have 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. There were unverified reports that one senior monk received a death sentence; it is 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 (put down without incident). 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.

Aside from the alleged government instigation of anti-Muslim violence, authorities also refused to approve requests for gatherings to celebrate traditional Muslim holidays and restricted the number of Muslims that can gather in one place.

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

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

The Government continued to prevent Buddhist monks, along with all other segments of society, from calling for democracy and political dialogue with prodemocracy forces. During the period covered by this report, government efforts to control these monks included travel restrictions, arrests, pressure on Buddhist leaders to expel "undisciplined monks," and a prohibition on certain monasteries from receiving political party members as overnight guests. More than 100 monks credibly have been identified as having been imprisoned during the 1990s for supporting democracy and human rights; however, about half of these have been released, and there was no reliable estimate of the number of Buddhist clergy in prisons or labor camps at the end of the period covered by this report. Monks serving sentences of life in prison reportedly included the Venerable U Kalyana of Mandalay, a member of the Aung San Red Star Association, and the Venerable U Kawiya of the Phayahyi monastery in Mandalay.

In August 2001, at a religious ceremony in Mandalay, a Buddhist monk reportedly was arrested for delivering a sermon critical of the prevailing economic and political situation. There was no information available on whether he was later released or if he remains in prison. In 2002, the authorities expropriated a Rangoon monastery presided over by a senior Buddhist monk. This seizure led to complaints and the subsequent arrest of eight monks.

There continued to be credible reports from diverse regions of the country that government officials compelled persons, especially in rural areas, to contribute money, food, or uncompensated labor to state-sponsored projects to build, renovate, or maintain Buddhist religious shrines or monuments. The Government calls these contributions "voluntary donations" and imposes them on both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. In recent years, there had been credible reports that Muslims in Arakan State have been compelled to build Buddhist pagodas as part of the country's forced labor program. These pagodas often have been built on confiscated Muslim land. There were no known reports of such activity in Arakan State during the period covered by this report; however, Chin leaders reported that prior to Prime Minister Khin Nyunt's visit to the region in December 2003, Christians in Tidim Township were forced to help build a Buddhist pagoda and monastery. There also were reports of forced labor being used to dismantle temples and monasteries.

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 traveling in Sagaing Division in the northwestern region of the country in May 2003. The Government reportedly used criminals dressed in monks' robes in the ambush.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

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

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

Abuses by Terrorists

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, both in hiring and in other areas—for non-Buddhists during British colonial rule, and for Buddhists since independence—is a key source of these tensions. There is widespread prejudice against ethnic Indians, particularly ethnic Bengalis, many of whom are Muslims. The Government reportedly contributed to or instigated anti-Muslim violence in cities throughout the country in 1997, 2001, and 2003.

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

The U.S. 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 staff 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 Chief of Mission hosted an Iftaar celebration for Muslim leaders and regular receptions for senior members of the Catholic and Protestant clergy.

Through public diplomacy outreach and by traveling as much as permitted by the Government, Embassy staff 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. In two cases the Embassy offered educational advice and assistance to human resource training programs run by the Catholic Church and hosted visitor programs that examined the religious community's role in conflict resolution.

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.

In July 2003, the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act and an accompanying Executive Order imposed new sanctions on the country, including banning the importation of products from the country into the United States and the export of finan-

cial services from the United States to it. Previously, the U.S. Government had also discontinued bilateral aid to the Government, suspended issuance of licenses to export arms to the country, and suspended the generalized system of preferences and Export Import Bank financial services in support of U.S. exports to the country. The U.S. Government also 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, halted issuance of visas to high government 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 1997.

CAMBODIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, 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 the 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 approximately 67,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 13.4 million. Approximately 93 percent of the population is Hinayana, or Theravada, Buddhist. The Buddhist tradition is widespread and active in all provinces, with an estimated 4,100 pagodas throughout the country. 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 remainder of the population includes approximately 700,000 Muslims, predominantly ethnic Chams, who generally are located in towns and rural fishing villages on the banks of the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers and in Kampot province. There are four branches of Islam represented in the country: the Malay-influenced Shafi branch, which constitutes 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, which represents 3 percent of Muslims; and the Kadiani branch, which also represents 3 percent of the Muslim population. The country's small Christian community, although growing, constitutes slightly more than 1 percent of the population. More than 100 separate Christian organizations or denominations operate freely throughout the country and include more than 1,000 congregations. Other religious organizations with small followings include the Vietnamese Cao Dai religion and the Baha'i Faith, with approximately 2,000 practicing members in each group.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The law requires all religious groups, including Buddhists, 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 to insult other religious groups, create disputes, or undermine national security. There is no penalty for failing to register. Religious groups have not encountered significant difficulties in obtaining approval for construction of places of

worship. No significant constraints on religious assembly were reported during the period covered by this report.

In January 2003, the Ministry of Cults and Religions issued a Directive on Controlling External Religions. The directive requires registration of places of worship and religious schools, in addition to government approval prior to constructing new places of worship. Places of worship must be located at least 2 kilometers from each other and may not be used for political purposes or to house criminals or fugitives from the law. The order requires that religious teachings respect other religions. The distance limitation enumerated in the directive has begun to be enforced, but it is limited to approvals for new construction of places of worship and does not affect offices of religious organizations.

Government officials continue to organize annual meetings for representatives of all religious groups to discuss religious developments and to address issues of concern. The Ministry of Cults and Religions is involved in arbitrating certain religious disputes as they arise.

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

The 2003 Directive on Controlling External Religions prohibits public proselytizing. However, enforcement is limited to a ban on door-to-door proselytizing during the lunch hours of 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. daily.

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, adherents of the Muslim and Christian faiths reported minor conflicts. In July 2003, a mob of angry villagers severely damaged a local Christian church in Svey Rieng Province, blaming the construction of the church several years earlier for the area's drought. Police authorities went to the area to prevent another attack on the church. In August 2003, a tribal group in Rattanakiri Province demanded that a Christian group stop conducting conversion activities in their villages.

Occasional tensions have been reported among the branches of Islam, which 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 the Cham Muslims are integrated well into society, enjoy positions of prominence in business and in 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. U.S. Embassy representatives met with religious leaders on various issues and contacted representatives of religious nongovernmental organizations and other groups representing the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian faiths. The Embassy has initiated a Muslim outreach program that provides for additional channels of information on the status of religious freedom in the country among the Muslim population. In addition the Embassy con-

tinues to follow closely the status of national and foreign practitioners of Falun Gong.

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 discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Taiwan has a total area of approximately 13,892 square miles, and its population is approximately 23 million. While the authorities do not collect or independently verify statistics on religious affiliation, they maintain registration statistics voluntarily reported by the religious organizations. In 2003, statistics reported by registered organizations suggest that of the total population 7,600,000 (33 percent) were Taoist; 5,486,000 (23.9 percent) Buddhist; 791,000 (3.4 percent) I Kuan Tao; 605,000 (2.6 percent) Protestant; 279,232 (1.2 percent) Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor Religion); 200,000 (0.8 percent) Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion); 182,814 (0.7 percent) Roman Catholics; 182,000 (0.7 percent) practiced Li-ism; 152,500 (0.6 percent) Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion); 110,000 (0.4 percent) Maitreya Great Tao; 58,000 (0.2 percent) Sunni Muslim; and 30,000 (0.1 percent) Tien Li Chiao (Heaven Reason Religion).

In addition the Church of Scientology reported 16,000 members; the Baha'i Faith reported 16,000; Confucians reported 13,000; World Red Swastika Society reported 5,000; Zhonghua Sheng Chiao (Chinese Holy Religion) reported 3,200; Maitreya Emperor Religion reported 3,000; Hai Tzu Tao (Innocent Child Religion) reported 2,300; Ta I Chiao (Great Changes Religion) reported 1,000; Mahikari Religion reported 1,000; and Huang Chung (Yellow Middle) reported 850. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Secret Sect of Tibetan Lamaism (Mizong Buddhism), and Unification Church are also registered but did not provide membership statistics.

The non-Catholic Christian denominations include Presbyterians, True Jesus, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. There also are a small number of Jews. More than 70 percent of the indigenous population (Aborigines) are Christian. The majority of religious adherents either are Buddhist or Taoist, but many people consider themselves both Buddhist and Taoist. Approximately 50 percent of the population regularly participates in some form of organized religious practice. Almost 14 percent of the population is believed to be atheist.

In addition to practicing religion, many persons also follow a collection of beliefs that are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture that can be referred to as "traditional Chinese folk religion." These beliefs include, but are not limited to, shamanism, ancestor worship, magic, ghosts and other spirits, and aspects of animism. Such folk religion may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions. There also may be an overlap between practitioners of such religions as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and practitioners of Falun Gong, which is registered as a civic rather than religious organization. Falun Gong membership has grown rapidly in recent years to as many as 300,000. Observers have estimated that as much as 80 percent of the population believes in some form of traditional folk religion.

Religious beliefs cross political and geographical lines. Members of the political leadership practice various faiths. 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 on 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).

Foreign missionary groups, including Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, are active in Taiwan.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Although registration is not mandatory, 25 religious organizations have registered with the Religious Affairs Section of the Ministry of the Interior (MOI). Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, or the chapter of the Civil Code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship may register with local authorities, many choose not to register and operate as the personal property of their leaders. Registered organizations operate on a tax-free basis and are required to make annual reports of their financial operations. In the past, concern over abuse of tax-free privileges or other financial misdeeds occasionally prompted the authorities to deny registration to new religions whose doctrines were not clear; however, there were no reports that the authorities sought to deny registration to new religions during the period covered by this report. The only ramification for nonregistration is the forfeiture of the tax advantages that are available for religious organizations.

A draft religion law, which was proposed by various religious groups to replace the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, and the chapter of the Civil Code governing religious foundations and associations, is pending in the Legislative Yuan.

Religious instruction is not permitted at the elementary, middle, or high school levels in public or private schools that have been accredited by the Ministry of Education. Religious organizations are permitted to operate schools, but religious instruction is not permitted in those schools. If the schools are not accredited formally by the Ministry of Education, they may provide religious instruction. Educational and government authorities have not used registration requirements as a pretext to restrict religious instruction. High schools may provide general courses in religious studies, and universities and research institutions have religious studies departments. Religious organizations operate theological seminaries.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely.

The Ministry of the Interior promotes interfaith understanding among religious groups by sponsoring symposiums or by helping defray the expenses of privately sponsored symposiums on religious issues. The MOI also publishes an introduction to major religious beliefs and groups in Taiwan based on material provided by the groups. In addition the MOI holds annual ceremonies to honor religious groups that have made contributions to public service, social welfare, and other activities that have promoted social harmony and served the underprivileged.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There is no restriction on religious groups articulating political views or participating in political activities. During the campaign for the March 20 presidential election, some major Buddhist groups openly endorsed the opposition candidate. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has been active in politics, particularly in the pro-independence movement, and maintains contact with some elements of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party. The PRC Government has accused the Taiwan-based Falun Gong group of interfering with legitimate mainland China television satellite transmissions. The Taiwan authorities claimed to have investigated but said they found no evidence of these activities.

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 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 seminar was not held in 2003 because of the outbreak of SARS in Asia. The seminar has been scheduled for August 27–29, 2004, at Catholic Fu Jen University in Taipei.

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 American Institute in Taiwan is in frequent contact with representatives of human rights organizations and occasionally 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 religious groups to prevent the rise of groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Despite these efforts at government control, membership in many faiths is growing rapidly.

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for many unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. The extent of religious freedom varied widely within the country. 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 either to register with the State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA, formerly known as the central Religious Affairs Bureau) or its provincial and local offices, still known as Religious Affairs Bureaus (RAB). They also reported facing pressure to be affiliated with and supervised by official party organizations linked to the legally recognized churches. 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. During the period covered by this report, Government officials cautioned against "foreign infiltration under the guise of religion." The Government increased scrutiny of contacts between some citizens and foreigners involved in religion and detained some citizens for providing religious information to foreigners. Nonetheless, some local officials encouraged foreign religious groups to work in their communities to supply social services, provided that the groups did not proselytize openly. Many religious adherents reported that they were able to practice their faith in officially registered places of worship without interference from the authorities. Official sources, religious professionals, and persons who attend services at both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the number of believers in the country continued to grow.

Senior government officials claim that the country has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. In many areas of the country, children are able to participate in religious life with their parents but local officials in some areas forbid children from full religious participation. For example, local officials in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) have stated that persons younger than 18 are forbidden from entering mosques in Xinjiang. Local officials in Jilin City also have stated that it is illegal for minors of any faith to participate in religious activities;

however, Jilin provincial officials disagree, stating that minors in the province are accorded full religious freedom. Senior government officials have consistently declined to clarify publicly the country's policy toward minors and religion.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as "cults" in general and of the Falun Gong in particular. The arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Christian-based groups that the Government considered cults were subjected to increased government scrutiny during the period covered by this report.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. President Bush discussed religious freedom during his December 2003 meeting with Premier Wen Jiabao. Senior U.S. officials called on the Government to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and 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. The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made concerted efforts to encourage religious freedom. In Washington and in Beijing, in public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise religious freedom and to release of all those serving sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners. During the period covered by this report, some religious prisoners were released from prison, including Tibetan nun Phuntsog Nyidrol. Religious freedom also was a key agenda item in the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, until the Government suspended the dialogue in March. In the most recent round of the bilateral dialogue, in December 2002, the Chinese agreed to host separate visits by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not allowed either visit. In 2003, the Government twice postponed planned visits by USCIRF representatives at the last minute. Following those postponements, in January USCIRF members visited Hong Kong, a visit Chinese authorities publicly criticized.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 3.5 million square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2002 Government White Paper, there are more than 200 million religious adherents, representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. According to this official publication, the country has more than 100,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, more than 3,000 religious organizations, and 74 training centers for clergy.

The country has five officially recognized religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. 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 subscribe to any religious faith. Approximately 8 percent of the population is Buddhist, approximately 1.4 percent is Muslim, an estimated 0.4 percent belongs to the official Catholic Church, an estimated 0.4 to 0.8 percent belongs to the unofficial Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church, an estimated 0.8 to 1.2 percent is registered as Protestant, and at least 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.

Buddhists make up the largest body of organized religious believers. The Government estimates that there are more than 100 million Buddhists, most of whom are from the dominant Han ethnic group. However, it is difficult to estimate accurately

the number of Buddhists because they do not have congregational memberships and often do not participate in public ceremonies. The Government reports that there are 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries and more than 200,000 nuns and monks.

According to government figures, there are 20 million Muslims, more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (at least 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. 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 far larger than the 5 million persons registered with the official Catholic Church. Precise figures are impossible to determine, but Vatican officials have estimated that the country has as many as 10 million Catholics in both the official and unofficial churches. According to official figures, the government-approved Catholic Church has 69 bishops, 5,000 clergy, and over 5,600 churches and meetinghouses. There are thought to be some 37 bishops operating "underground," some of whom are likely in prison or under house arrest.

The Government maintains that the country has more than 15 million registered Protestants, 20,000 clergy, more than 16,000 churches, and approximately 25,000 registered Protestant meeting places. Protestant church officials have estimated that at least 20 million Chinese worship in official churches. Foreign and Chinese sources estimate that at least 30 million persons worship in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control. Some foreign academics estimate that the country's Protestants may number as many as 90 million. Domestic and foreign experts agree that the number of Protestants in the country is growing.

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. Falun Gong blends aspects of Taoism, Buddhism, and the meditation techniques and physical exercises of qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi (a native of the country who lives in the United States). Despite the spiritual content of some of Li's teachings, Falun Gong does not consider itself a religion and has no clergy or places of worship.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to 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 officially recognized religions, there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities. The State Council's State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA) is responsible for monitoring and judging the legitimacy of religious activity. The SARA and the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD) 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 UFWD are rarely religious adherents and often are party members. Communist Party members are directed by party doctrine to be atheists.

Chinese law requires religious groups to register places of worship. Spiritual activities in churches that have not registered may be considered illegal and participants can be punished. There are six requirements for the registration of "venues

for religious activity": Possession of a physical site, citizens who are religious believers and who regularly take part in religious activity, an organized governing board, a minimum number of followers, a set of operating rules, and a legal source of income. Government officials claim that registration requirements are simple and places of worship are not required to affiliate with one of the five official "patriotic" religious organizations that correspond to the five recognized faiths.

Nearly all local RAB officials require Protestant churches to affiliate with the (Protestant) Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC). Credentialing procedures also can effectively require clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC, since the experts who vet clergy qualifications are drawn from the TSPM/CCC. 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 in Heilongjiang Province has been able to operate without affiliating with a government organization, in part because the PRC has not created an Orthodox organization. In other regions, official 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.

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

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 (pilgrimage) to Mecca. In the first half of 2004, a record of over 10,000 Chinese Muslims made the hajj, half of them on government-organized delegations.

During the period covered by this report, local officials destroyed several unregistered places of worship around the country, although there were no reports of the widespread razing of churches. In Zhejiang Province, for example, there were reports that a few churches and hundreds of shrines were destroyed in the period from July to October 2003. Zhejiang authorities often claimed that destroyed buildings were not zoned for religious activities and thus unsafe. 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 December 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 November 2003, the CCP Central Committee held a high-level meeting in Beijing attended by Politburo members and other high-ranking officials responsible for overseeing religion. In January, a national work conference on religion organized by SARA was held to outline concrete actions to "strengthen religious work." The conference advised that officials should guard against Christian-influenced "cults" and avoid negative influences, including "foreign infiltration under cover of religion."

Conference attendees also raised concern about circulation of foreign religious materials addressing the growth of Christianity in the country, including a documentary film entitled "The Cross" and a book entitled "Jesus in Beijing." Subsequently, many provinces convened their own local work conferences. For example, in February the Fujian Province conference noted that unauthorized establishment of religious venues and icons "interferes with the Government's administration of religious affairs, affects the normal activities of patriotic religious groups, helps the development of evil cults and illegal religious powers, and gives foreign countries opportunities to conduct religious penetration." The 2004 national work conference was a contrast to a landmark 2001 conference at which President Jiang Zemin spoke about the sustained role of religion in society and raised questions about the traditional Marxist concept of opposing religion.

In March, the 10th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) recommended revising the CPPCC Charter to permit the "freedom of religious belief."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for religious freedom and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for members of some unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. The Government tends to perceive unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority, and it attempts to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of groups or sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP.

Some local authorities continued a selective crackdown on unregistered churches, temples, and mosques, and the Central Government failed to stop these activities. Police closed underground mosques, temples, and seminaries, as well as some Catholic churches and Protestant "house churches," many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. Several unregistered church leaders reported 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 also makes demands on the clergy or leadership of registered groups, for example, requiring that they publicly endorse government policies or denounce Falun Gong. The Government continued its harsh repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement and of "cults" in general. As in past years, local authorities moved against houses of worship outside their control that grew too large or espoused beliefs considered threatening to "state security." Overall, the basic policy of permitting religious activity to take place relatively unfettered in government-approved sites and under government control remained unchanged.

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

In 1995, the State Council and the CCP's Central Committee issued a circular labeling a number of religious organizations "cults" and making them illegal. Among these were the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church, and the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy).

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

During the period covered by this report, government repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement continued. At the National People's Congress session in March, Premier Wen Jiabao's Government Work Report emphasized that the Government would "expand and deepen its battle against cults," including Falun Gong. Thousands of individuals were still undergoing criminal, administrative, and extrajudicial punishment for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhered to the teachings of Falun Gong, or refusing to criticize the organization or

its founder. There were credible reports of torture and deaths in custody of Falun Gong practitioners (see Abuses of Freedom of Religion Section).

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

The Government has labeled folk religions as "feudal superstition," and followers sometimes were subject to harassment and repression.

The Government continued a national campaign to enforce 1994 State Council regulations and subsequent provincial regulations that require all places of religious activity to register with government religious affairs authorities. There was a great deal of variation in how local authorities handled unregistered religious groups. In certain regions, government supervision of religious activity was minimal, and registered and unregistered churches existed openly side by side and were treated similarly by the authorities. In such areas, many congregants worshipped in both types of churches. In other regions, local implementing regulations call for strict government oversight of religion, and authorities cracked down on unregistered churches and their members. Implementing regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce vigorously government policy regarding unregistered churches.

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

Due to a lack of transparent guidelines, local officials have great discretion in determining whether "house churches" violate regulations. The term "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. Unregistered churches are illegal, but prayer meetings and Bible study groups held in homes are legal and generally are not subject to registration requirements so long as they remain small and unobtrusive. In some parts of the country, unregistered house churches with hundreds of members meet openly with the full knowledge of local authorities, who characterize the meetings as informal gatherings to pray, sing, and study the Bible. In other areas, house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends are strictly proscribed. House churches often encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups. As a result, 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. Some Catholic clerics also have complained that they were forced to bribe local officials before being allowed to enter seminaries. Due to government prohibitions, unofficial or underground churches have particularly significant problems training clergy, and many clergy receive only limited and inadequate preparation.

Most religious institutions depend upon their own resources to cover operating costs. Contributions from church members are common among both Catholics and Protestants. Frequently, some religious institutions run side businesses selling religious items, while others run strictly commercial businesses, such as restaurants. Sometimes the Government funds repairs for temples or shrines that have cultural or historic significance. Official religious communities sometimes received funds from abroad.

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.

However, according to government sources, up to 25 percent of Communist Party officials in certain localities engage in some kind of religious activity. Most officials who practice a religion are 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.

In 1999, the Party's Central Committee issued a document directing the authorities to tighten control over the official Catholic Church and to eliminate the underground Catholic Church if it did not bend to government control. There has been continued pressure by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association on underground Catholic bishops to join the official Church, and the authorities have reorganized dioceses without consulting church leaders. The Government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and there is no Vatican representative on the Mainland. The Government's refusal to allow the official Catholic Church to recognize the authority of the Papacy in many fundamental matters of faith and morals has led many Catholics to reject joining the official Catholic Church on the grounds that this denies one of the foundational tenets of their faith. When government policy and Papal authority conflict—as they do, for example, on abortion or birth control—state policy takes precedence, leaving priests with the dilemma of how to advise their practitioners. Most bishops of the official Catholic Church are, in fact, clandestinely recognized by the Vatican. Nonetheless, tensions between the Vatican and the Government have caused leadership problems within the official Catholic Church in the country due to the friction between some bishops who have been consecrated with secret Vatican approval (or who obtained such secret approval after their consecration) and others consecrated without such approval.

Government relations with unofficial Catholic churches remained tense. Both Chinese and Vatican authorities stated that they would welcome an agreement to normalize relations. Nonetheless, disagreements concerning the role of the Pope in selecting bishops, the status of underground Catholic clerics, Vatican recognition of Taiwan, and the canonization of controversial Catholic missionaries on Chinese National Day 2000 remained obstacles, according to the Government. During the period covered by this report, the Government stated that statements by Hong Kong Diocese Bishop Joseph Zen about political developments in the Hong Kong SAR had become an obstacle to normalization of relations with the Vatican. Nonetheless, efforts at reconciliation continued, including a visit by Bishop Zen to Shanghai in April.

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 teachers, professors, and university students are not allowed to practice religion openly. 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, ar-

rests, 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.

For example, in 2002 State Councilor Ismail Amat (an ethnic Uighur) told a delegation of National People's Congress delegates that, "while enjoying the rights of religious freedom, the citizens who have religious beliefs must place the basic interests of the State and the people before everything else," and that "we must not use the freedom of religious belief as an excuse to abandon or to dodge the management of religious affairs by the State."

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.

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 on several occasions in a historic Shanghai synagogue, which was restored as a museum in 1998. Local authorities continue to allow the use of the synagogue on a case-by-case basis for major holidays. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) meets regularly in a number of cities, but its membership is limited strictly to the expatriate community.

The authorities permit officially sanctioned religious organizations to maintain international contacts that do not involve "foreign control." What constitutes "control" is not defined. Regulations enacted in 1994, and expanded in 2000, codified many existing rules involving foreigners, including a ban on proselytizing. However, for the most part, the authorities allowed foreign nationals to preach to other foreigners, 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 addition foreign-produced materials about modern Christianity in the country, including the documentary film "The Cross" and the book "Jesus in Beijing," were banned by the Government. Some Christians who appeared in the film were interrogated or detained by authorities for brief periods.

The increase in the number of Christians in the country has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles. One printing company, a joint venture with an overseas Christian organization, has printed over 25 million Bibles since its founding in 1987, including Bibles in Braille and minority languages, such as Korean, Jingbo, Lisu, Lahu, Miao and Yao. 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 costs from one to five dollars, making them 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 September 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. Senior government officials have not expressed a willingness to clarify this discrepancy. In some Muslim areas, minors attend religious schools in addition to state-run schools. In some areas, large numbers of young persons attend religious services at both registered and unregistered places of worship.

Official religious organizations administer local Bible schools, 54 Catholic and Protestant seminaries, 10 institutes to train imams and Islamic scholars, and over 30 institutes to train Buddhist monks. Students who attend these institutes must demonstrate "political reliability," and all graduates must pass an examination on their theological and political knowledge to qualify for the clergy.

The Government has stated that there are 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 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 12,826 in 2002, down significantly from previous years. Most experts agree that the spike in detentions on these charges in 1999–2000 resulted from the Government's crackdown, begun in mid-1999, on 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 have died in custody. For example, in December 2003, Falun Gong practitioner Liu Chengjun died after reportedly being abused in custody in Jilin Province. Foreign observers estimate that 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. 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. During April to June 2003, official Chinese media accused Falun Gong adherents of "undermining anti-SARS operations." Over 180 Falun Gong adherents were detained for allegedly inciting public panic and "spreading false rumors about SARS."

In April, 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 for the death.

In some areas, security authorities used threats, demolition of unregistered property, extortion, interrogation, detention, and at times beatings and torture to harass leaders of unauthorized groups and their followers. Unregistered religious groups that preach beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine (such as imminent coming of the Apocalypse or holy war) or groups that have charismatic leaders often are singled out for particularly severe harassment. Some observers have attributed the unorthodox beliefs of some of these groups to poorly trained clergy and

lack of access to religious texts. Others believe that some individuals may be exploiting the reemergence of interest in religion for personal gain.

Many religious leaders and adherents have been detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms. Local authorities also use an administrative process to punish members of unregistered religious groups. Citizens may be sentenced by a 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 September 2003, house church historian Zhang Yinan and legal advisor to the South China Church Xiao Biguang were detained in Henan Province. Xiao remains detained and Zhang was sentenced to 2 years of reeducation through labor. He reportedly was beaten in the camp. In October 2003, Beijing-based house Christian Liu Fenggang was detained in Xiaoshan, Zhejiang Province, while conducting an investigation into reports of church demolitions and detention of leaders in the Local Assembly ("Little Flock") Church. Two other house Christians, Xu Yonghai and Zhang Shengqi, also remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report, allegedly for helping Liu provide information to foreign organizations. In March, the three were tried in Zhejiang Province on charges of disclosing state secrets. In January, house Christian activists Qiao Chunling, Xu Yongling, and Zeng Guangbo reportedly were detained because of their alleged effort to communicate about activities of house churches with foreigners. House Christian activists in several regions were prevented from leaving their homes during the meeting of the National People's Congress in March. In June, 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. Also in June, dozens of leaders of the China Gospel Fellowship Protestant Church reportedly were detained in Wuhan, Hubei Province, but they were released after a short period. Gouxing "Philip" Xu reportedly was released from a reeducation-through-labor camp in June after being detained in December 2002 in Shanghai for unlicensed preaching.

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 Bang Kun Gong 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. Additionally, elderly church member Chen Jingmao reportedly was abused in prison for attempting to convert inmates to Christianity. Government officials and some registered and unregistered Protestants accused the South China Church of being a "cult."

In Hebei, where an estimated half of the country's Catholics reside, friction between unofficial Catholics and 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 Catholics have been forced into hiding. Numerous detentions of unofficial Catholic clergy were reported. In June, the Vatican formally protested the detention earlier in the year of three underground Catholic bishops from Hebei Province. Two were released shortly after their detention, although the whereabouts of 84-year-old Zhao Zhendong of Xuanhua City remained unclear. Underground Bishops Wei Jingyi of Heliongjiang Province and Jia Zhiguo of Hebei Province reportedly were detained for a few days before being released in March and April respectively. Bishop Jia Zhiguo reportedly was again detained for several days in June, along with two other underground bishops. 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. In July and October 2003 and also in May, underground priests and practitioners reportedly were detained in separate incidents in Hebei Province. The status of Father Lu Xiaozhou (Bosco), detained in June 2003 in Zhejiang Province, reportedly for administering sacraments to a dying Catholic, also had not been confirmed by the Government. According to several nongovern-

mental organizations (NGOs), a number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during the period covered by this report.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The communities of the five official religions—Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestantism—coexist without significant friction. However, in some parts of the country, there is a tense relationship between registered and unregistered Christian churches. There were reports of divisions within both the official Protestant church and the house church movement over issues of doctrine; in both the registered and unregistered Protestant churches there are conservative and more liberal groups. In other areas, the two groups coexist without problems. In some provinces, including Hebei, underground and official Catholic communities sometimes have a tense relationship. In the past, Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists have complained about the presence of Christian missionaries in their communities. 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 the affairs of the religious minority 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. 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 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. At the same time, U.S. officials argued to the country's leaders that freedom of religion can strengthen, not harm, the country. In December 2003, President Bush met with Premier Wen Jiabao in Washington and called for greater religious tolerance.

The U.S. Embassy and Consulates also collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within the country's religious communities, including bishops, priests, and ministers of the official Christian and Catholic churches, as well as Taoist, Muslim and Buddhist leaders. U.S. officials also met with leaders and members of the unofficial Christian churches. The Department of State's nongovernmental contacts 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 suspended the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, which included religious freedom as a major agenda item. The most recent Dialogue session took place in December 2002, at which the Government stated its willingness to clarify its policy on religious education for minors. It also committed to invite the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to visit the country. However, the Government did not schedule these visits during the period covered by this report.

During the period covered by this report, the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor traveled to the country to discuss human rights and religious freedom issues with the Chinese Government. Two delegations of staff members of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and one from the Office for International Religious Freedom also traveled to the country to discuss religious freedom issues. In addition to meetings in Beijing, one of these delegations traveled to Xinjiang, and the other visited the TAR to discuss religious freedom. They met with Government officials responsible for religion, and with clergy or practitioners in official and unofficial religious groups. In June, an interfaith delegation from the NGO Appeal of Conscience Foundation visited Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai to discuss religious freedom and individual prisoners of conscience with Chinese officials.

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 until March, when 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 UNHRC session.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

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. Some overseas Falun Gong practitioners were denied entry into Hong Kong to attend an annual conference in May.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Consulate General officers meet regularly with religious leaders.

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

Hong Kong's 300,000 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) also is present.

There are approximately 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, approximately 800 Christian churches and chapels, 4 mosques, 1 Hindu temple, 1 Sikh temple, and 1 synagogue. The 240,000 Catholics are served by approximately 300 priests, 60 monks, and 500 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 700 schools. Religious leaders tend to focus primarily on local spiritual, educational, social, and medical needs. Some religious leaders and communities maintain active contacts with their mainland and international counterparts. Catholic and Protestant clergy are invited to give seminars on the mainland, teach classes there, and develop two-way student exchanges on an ongoing basis. Numerous foreign missionary groups operate in and out of HKSAR.

A wide range of faiths is represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service. A large number of influential non-Christians receive education 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 at all levels strives to protect religious freedom and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Although a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since July 1, 1997, 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 HKSAR recognize the Pope as the head of the Catholic Church.

Religious groups wishing to purchase a site to construct a school or hospital initiate their request with the Lands Department. Church-affiliated schools make their request to the Education and Manpower Bureau. Church-affiliated hospitals do so with the Health and Welfare Bureau. For other matters, the Home Affairs Bureau functions as a liaison between religious groups and the 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 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 spiritual movement known as Falun Gong, which does not consider itself a religion, is registered under the Societies Ordinance, practices freely, and is able to stage public demonstrations. The legal appeal of 16 Falun Gong practitioners convicted of obstruction of public space and minor assault during demonstrations in March 2002 outside the PRC Government Liaison Office was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Xiang Gong and Yan Xin Qigong, also are registered and practiced freely in HKSAR.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not have jurisdiction over religious practices in 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 HKSAR. In September 2002, Bishop Joseph Zen was appointed head of Hong Kong's Catholic Diocese. In April Bishop 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 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. At least two bookstores carried Falun Gong books. Three local newspapers printed ads purchased by the group protesting the PRC Government's actions against its members. In May more than 700 Falun Gong adherents, including 350 from overseas, held an annual conference at a privately owned facility in Hong Kong. Twenty-three practitioners from Taiwan and 6 from Macau were denied entry, while 250 Taiwan practitioners and 4 Macau practitioners were allowed entry to attend the conference. The Government stated "security" was the reason for barring the entry of the 29 practitioners.

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. On behalf of four of the overseas practitioners who were denied entry, the local Falun Gong association submitted an application for judicial review against the Immigration Department's decision to refuse entry. In October 2003, the court rejected the application on grounds that the group's chairman did not have sufficient interest to support it.

In 2002, an Australian artist and Falun Gong practitioner exhibited art at a public venue. The artist's exhibit catalog contained material critical of the mainland Government's treatment of Falun Gong practitioners. The Government requested that the exhibit organizer not distribute the catalog but took no action when the organizer disregarded the request.

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 communities in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the HKSAR Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Consulate General officers have made clear U.S. government interests 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 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 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

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

Missionaries are active in 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, 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 received education 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 June 2003.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not govern religious practices in 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."

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

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 religious leaders.

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 May White Paper on "Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet" states, "Tibetans fully enjoy the freedom of religious belief." However, the Government maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas of China. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppress activities they view as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, such as religious activities venerating the Dalai Lama, (which the Chinese Government describes 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 and 2003, and they were negotiating a third set of visits at the end of the period covered by this report. Authorities released long-serving Tibetan monks and nuns from TAR Prison (also known as Drapchi Prison) in September 2003, February, and April. However, in October 2003, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported the death of a young monk serving a sentence in Sichuan Province, allegedly due to maltreatment received in prison. Numerous Buddhist leaders, such as Gendun Choekyi Nyima, Tenzin Deleg, and Sonam Phuntsog, remain in detention or prison, and key figures such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama remain in exile. The Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, rendering it difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. The "patriotic education" campaign begun in the mid-1990s officially concluded in 2000, but coercive activities to ensure the political reliability of monks and nuns continued. Core requirements of "patriotic education," such as the renunciation of the Dalai Lama and the acceptance of Tibet as a part of China, continued to engender resentment on the part of Tibetan Buddhists. Dozens of monks and nuns continued to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic education."

While there is some friction between Tibetan Buddhists and the growing Muslim Hui population in cities of the Tibetan areas, it is attributable more to economic competition and cultural differences than to religious differences. The Christian population in the TAR is extremely small. There are some reports that converts to Christianity have encountered societal pressure.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Tibetan areas of China have a total land area of 871,649 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas is 5,354,540. Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism and the traditional Tibetan Bon religion to some degree. This includes many Tibetans who are government officials. 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 700 parishioners, which is located in the tradition-

ally Catholic community of Yanjing in the eastern TAR. While officials state that there is no Falun Gong activity in the TAR, reports indicate small numbers of practitioners among the Han Chinese population.

The Government's May White Paper states that the TAR has over 46,000 Buddhist monks and nuns and more than 1,700 venues for Tibetan Buddhist activities. 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 is very strictly controlled; approximately 60,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns live in Tibetan areas outside the TAR, according to informed estimates.

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, and the Government's May White Paper on "Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet" affirms, "Tibetans fully enjoy the freedom of religious belief." However, the Government seeks to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of the activity of religious groups. The Government remains suspicious of Tibetan Buddhism in general and its links to the Dalai Lama, and it maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppress those activities viewed as vehicles for political dissent, such as religious activities that are perceived as advocating Tibetan independence. Officials confirm that monks and nuns continue to undergo political training known as "patriotic education" on a regular basis at their religious sites. Political training has become a routine, and officially mandatory, feature of monastic life. However, the form, content, and frequency of such training appear to vary widely from monastery to monastery.

In 2002 and 2003, the Government extended invitations to emissaries of the Dalai Lama to visit Tibetan and other areas of China. In September 2002, Lodi Gyari and Kelsang Gyaltsen, the Dalai Lama's representatives to the United States and Europe respectively, traveled to Beijing, Lhasa, and other cities and met with a number of government officials. These were the first formal contacts between the Dalai Lama's representatives and the Government since 1993. They made a second trip to China in June 2003 to meet with Chinese officials and visited Shanghai, Beijing, and Tibetan areas in Yunnan Province. Additionally, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, visited in July 2002, making his first trip to the TAR since leaving in 1959. The Government asserted that the door to dialogue and negotiation was open, provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirms that Tibet and Taiwan are inseparable parts of China. Representatives of the Tibetan government-in-exile have announced that they were negotiating with the Chinese Government for the Dalai Lama's representatives to visit China later in 2004.

In its May White Paper, the Government claimed that it has contributed approximately $40 million (300 million RMB) to renovate and open over 1,400 monasteries and to repair cultural relics, many of which were destroyed before and during the Cultural Revolution. According to the document, the Government allocated $6.7 million (RMB 55 million) and large quantities of gold and silver for the first phase of renovation of Lhasa's Potala Palace from 1989 to 1994. Since 2001 it claims to have allocated $40 million (RMB 330 million) for the second phase of the renovation of the Potala Palace, as well as the Norbulingka Palace (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 remain only partially repaired. Government funding of restoration efforts was ostensibly done to support the practice of religion, but also was done in part to promote the development of tourism in 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 associate Buddhist monasteries with pro-independence activism in Tibetan areas of China. In many places, particularly in the TAR, the Government continued to discourage the proliferation of monasteries, which it

contended were a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. The Government states that there are no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, and that each monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC) decides independently how many monks the monastery can support. However, many of these committees are government-controlled, and in practice the Government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in many 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 period covered by this report. Authorities have curtailed the traditional practice of sending young boys to monasteries for religious training by means of regulations that forbid 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 also sat on the committees.

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 formerly had been fully supported had to engage in income-generating activities. Some experts are concerned that, as a result, fewer monks will be qualified to serve as teachers in the future. The erosion of the quality of religious teaching in the TAR and other Tibetan areas continued to be a focus of concern. The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in the TAR and other Tibetan areas was 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.

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 state openly that monks and nuns continue to undergo political education, likewise known as "patriotic education," on a regular basis (i.e. classes held four times per year) at their religious sites. Some religious leaders also hold local political positions. Since primary responsibility for conducting political education has shifted from government officials to monastery leaders, the form, content, and frequency of training at each monastery appears to have varied widely. However conducting such training remains a requirement and has become a routine part of monastic management.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 2,248 Tibetans presented themselves at the UNHCR office in Nepal during 2003, of whom 1,815 were found to be "of concern" and provided with basic assistance; the remaining 433 departed for India without being registered or processed by the UNHCR. In September 2003, TAR Public Security Bureau officials told a visiting foreign delegation that 1,000 residents of the TAR receive passports each year, and that residents make 2,000–3,000 trips abroad each year. However, some Tibetans, particularly those from rural areas, continued to report difficulties in obtaining passports. Due in part to such difficulties 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. During the period covered by this report, a group of 18 Tibetans forcibly repatriated to China from Nepal in May 2003 under pressure from Chinese officials reportedly suffered torture, including electric shocks, exposure to cold, and severe beatings, and were forced to perform heavy physical labor. Their family members were pressured 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.

Following the 1999 flight to India of the Karmapa Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kagyu school and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, authorities restricted access to Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Lama, and intensified "patriotic education" activities there. The Karmapa Lama stated that he decided to flee 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 during

the period covered by this report noted that the population of monks remains small and the atmosphere remains subdued.

After the Karmapa Lama's departure, the authorities expanded their efforts to control the process of identifying and educating reincarnated lamas. The Government approved the seventh reincarnation of Reting Rinpoche in 2000, but many of the monks at Reting Monastery reportedly did not accept the child as Reting Rinpoche because the Dalai Lama did not recognize his selection. Another young reincarnate lama, Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa Lama in 1994, lived under strict government supervision at Nenang Monastery. Foreign delegations have been refused permission to visit Nenang Monastery.

Government officials maintained that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama is not illegal. However, authorities appeared to view possession of such photos as sufficient 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. Diplomatic observers saw pictures of a number of Tibetan religious figures, including the Dalai Lama, openly displayed in Tibetan areas outside the TAR. However, in the months following an August 2003 incident in which unknown individuals hung the banned Tibetan national flag from a radio tower, private displays of Dalai Lama pictures were confiscated in urban areas of two Sichuan counties. 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, Gyaltsen Norbu, are not publicly displayed in most places, most likely because very few Tibetans recognize him as the Panchen Lama.

Approximately 615 Tibetan Buddhist religious figures hold positions in local People's Congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. However, 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 are members of the Communist Party and that religious belief is incompatible with Party membership. However, some lower level RAB officials practice Buddhism.

Authorities prohibit Tibetans from actively celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6. Celebrations of other major religious festivals such as Monlam Chenmo and the Drepung Shodon have been marked by a somewhat more open atmosphere and diminished security presence than in the past, but teachers and students at Tibet University were prohibited from actively celebrating the Saga Dawa festival in 2004.

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, and official foreign delegations had few opportunities to meet monks and nuns not previously approved by the local authorities.

In July 2003, authorities reportedly closed the Ngaba Kirti Monastic School in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, and summoned its chief patron, Soepa Nagur, to Sichuan's capital city Chengdu, according to the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD). Funded in 1994 with private funds to provide traditional Tibetan and monastic education to rural residents, the school attracted the attention of local authorities in 1998, who forced the school to change its name, include secular subjects in its curriculum, and finally merge with another nearby institution.

In January, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog, the charismatic founder of the Serthar Tibetan Buddhist Institute (also known as Larung Gar) in Sichuan Province's Kardze Prefecture, died while receiving medical treatment in the provincial capital Chengdu. Founded in 1980, the Institute grew to house 10,000 monks and nuns before authorities moved to destroy structures and expel students from the site in 2001, ultimately reducing the population to approximately 4,000. After a year's absence officially attributed to medical treatment, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog returned to the Institute in July 2002. As recently as May 2003, conflicts over attempts to rebuild some structures resulted in arrests and the enforced closure of the Institute to outsiders. After the abbot's death, Sichuan authorities forbade the province's Buddhist monks from attending his funeral; nevertheless, eyewitnesses reported that tens of thousands of Tibetan and Han Chinese monks defied the order to pay their respects.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and it is difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. While the atmosphere for lay religious practice is less restrictive

than in the recent past, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high, and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

In October 2003, Tibetan monk Nyima Dragpa of Dawu County in Sichuan Province's Kardze Prefecture died while serving a 9-year sentence for state subversion. Based on a letter the monk allegedly wrote before his death, NGO and foreign media observers attributed his death to torture suffered in prison. In November 2002, Tibetan Buddhist monk Lobsang Dhargyal reportedly died of a brain hemorrhage in a "reform through labor" camp in Qinghai Province. TCHRD attributed the monk's death to torture and maltreatment while in detention. There has been no official public confirmation of or investigation into Lobsang Dhargyal's death.

The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltsen Norbu, the boy it selected in 1995, is the Panchen Lama's 11th reincarnation. The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama in 1995 as the 11th Panchen Lama (when he was 6 years old), and his whereabouts are 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. While the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize the boy identified by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama, Tibetan monks have claimed that they were forced to sign statements pledging allegiance to the boy the Government selected. The Communist Party also urged its members to support the "official" Panchen Lama. Gyaltsen Norbu made his second highly orchestrated visit to Tibetan areas in August 2003, and his public appearances were marked by a heavy security presence.

Chadrel Rinpoche, the lama accused by the Government of betraying state secrets while helping the Dalai Lama choose the incarnation of the 11th Panchen Lama, was released from prison in January 2002, according to officials. There are reports that Chadrel Rinpoche is being held under house arrest near Lhasa, but officials have not confirmed his whereabouts and refused requests from the international community to meet with him. They continue to state that Chadrel Rinpoche is studying scriptures in seclusion. In August 2003, 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.

On February 12, police arrested Choeden Rinzen, a monk at Lhasa's Ganden Monastery, for possessing a Tibetan national flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama, according to Radio Free Asia. Two friends of Choeden Rinzen reportedly were arrested with him but later released.

According to statistics published in February by the Tibet Information Network (TIN), approximately 90 of the 136 male Tibetans documented by TIN as current political prisoners are monks, former monks, or reincarnate lamas, and 4 of the 6 female prisoners are nuns or former nuns. In April TAR justice and prison officials stated that approximately 3 percent of the 2,500 judicially sentenced inmates incarcerated in the TAR's three formally designated prisons were charged with "endangering state security." The majority of those approximately 75 prisoners are monks and nuns. As in previous years, there were credible reports of imprisonment and abuse and torture of monks and nuns accused of political activism, and of prisoners who were beaten because they resisted political re-education imposed by prison authorities.

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. Prominent religious leader Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, arrested for his alleged connection with a series of bombings in April 2002, remains imprisoned under a death sentence with a 2-year reprieve. Tenzin Deleg's former associate, Lobsang Dondrub, was executed on January 26, 2003, for his part in the alleged bombings. Lobsang Dondrub's execution occurred in contravention of Chinese government assurances that both individuals would be afforded full due process, and that the national-level Supreme People's Court would review their sentences. In response to repeated inquiries, Chinese officials have confirmed to U.S. and E.U. officials that the reprieve of Tenzin Deleg's death sentence will run for 2 years from the date the judgment became final. The Chinese Government has further clarified to U.S. officials that the judgment became final on January 26, 2003, when Tenzin Deleg lost his appeal before the Sichuan Higher People's Court.

In August 2003, five monks and an unidentified lay artist received sentences of 1 to 12 years' imprisonment for alleged separatist activities, including painting a Ti-

betan national flag, possessing pictures of the Dalai Lama, and distributing materials calling for Tibetan independence. The monks—Zoepa, Tsogphel, Sherab Dargye, Oezer, and Migyur—were all from Khangmar Monastery in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

Many other religious figures remained imprisoned during the period covered by this report, including Sonam Phuntsog, a Buddhist teacher in Kardze County, Sichuan Province, arrested in 1999 after leading a protest; Lhasa orphanage owners Jigme Tenzin and Nyima Choedron, convicted in 2002 of "espionage and endangering state security"; and approximately 10 persons detained in October 2002 in Kardze Town, Sichuan Province, in connection with long-life ceremonies for the Dalai Lama sponsored by foreign Tibetan Buddhists.

Since Falun Gong was banned in 1999, there have been reports of detentions of Falun Gong practitioners in the TAR. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in the TAR is believed to be small.

There were some positive developments regarding prisoners. On April 18, authorities reportedly released Tibetan Buddhist monk Ngawang Oezer from TAR Prison upon completion of a 15-year sentence for participating in pro-independence activities at Drepung Monastery. In August 2003, authorities had announced that Ngawang Oezer's sentence had been reduced by 2 years.

On February 24, authorities released Tibetan Buddhist nun Phuntsog Nyidrol from Lhasa's TAR Prison approximately 1 year before her sentence was due to expire. She had received a 9-year sentence for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in support of the Dalai Lama in 1989. Authorities extended her sentence to 17 years after she and other nuns recorded songs about their devotion to Tibet and the Dalai Lama in 1993 but reduced that sentence by 1 year in 2001.

In 2003, Tsurphu Monastery monks Panam and Thubten, arrested in 2002 on suspicion of assisting in the Karmapa Lama's flight to India, were released from prison and have returned to their monastery. In September 2003, authorities reportedly released long-serving Tibetan nun Lhamo Namdrol from prison upon conclusion of her 12-year sentence.

In February Nyima Choedron, former nun and co-director of the Gyatso Children's home, received a 1-year sentence reduction, according to TAR officials. In August 2003, the Government announced that the monk Jamphel Jangchub, imprisoned in Lhasa's TAR Prison for joining a pro-independence group in Drepung Monastery in the 1980s, received a sentence reduction of 3 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 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. There are some reports that converts to Christianity have encountered societal pressure, and some converts reportedly have been disinherited by their families.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas, 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.

The Ambassador and the Consul General have each raised the case of Tenzin Deleg during meetings with local officials on several occasions. Each time, U.S. officials urged local authorities to abide by Chinese government commitments that the imprisoned religious leader receive due process under the law. Senior State Department officers traveled to Lhasa in September 2003 for discussions with TAR authorities and with monks and practitioners at important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.

Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination. In January, following reports that Tibetans forcibly repatriated to China from Nepal in May 2003 had been subject to imprisonment and torture, the Ambassador lodged a protest in Beijing and Consulate Chengdu made a formal, written inquiry to the TAR authorities.

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 to the TAR and other Tibetan areas 13 times during the period covered by this report to monitor the status of religious freedom.

Development and exchange programs administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of State aim to strengthen Tibetan communities in China and preserve their environment and culture heritage. Both are inextricably linked to Tibet's Buddhist religious tradition. The U.S. Consulate in Chengdu has also promoted religious dialogue through its exchange visitor program, which financed the travel of two prominent scholars of traditional Tibetan culture and religion to the U.S.

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. U.S. Embassy officials maintained a steady dialogue with members of Parliament during their deliberations on legislation affecting religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 5,406 square miles and shares the island of Timor with Indonesia's Nusa Tenggara Timur Province. Based on the most recent statistics available from the World Bank, the population of the territory is approximately 876,000. The overwhelming majority of the population is Catholic, and the Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities are generally tolerant.

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

According to statistics issued by the former Indonesian administration in 1992, approximately 90 percent of the population was registered officially as Catholic, approximately 4 percent as Muslim, 3 percent as Protestant, and approximately 0.5 percent as Hindu. However, the above statistics may not have been completely accurate because during the Indonesian occupation, every resident was required to register as an adherent to one of Indonesia's five recognized religions (Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism). Some observers believe that a significant percentage of those registered as Catholics during the Indonesian occupations might have been better described as animists, a category not recognized by the Indonesian Government. Also, the number of Protestants, Muslims, and Hindus 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. It also appears that commitment to Catholicism among formerly nominal Catholics increased during the Indonesian occupation, in part because the Church was perceived as sympathetic to the resistance and also because Catholicism came to be regarded as a distinctive feature of national identity. The most recent estimate is that 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 Indonesian military forces formerly stationed in the country included among their ranks 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 that continue to operate in the country. 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 Arabic Muslims living in the country while under Portuguese authority. The latter group was well integrated into society, but ethnic Malay Muslims often were not. Only a few hundred ethnic Malay Muslims remained in the country following the 1999 vote for independence.

Domestic and foreign Catholic and Protestant missionary groups operate freely in the country. 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 was ratified in March 2002 and went into effect in May 2002, the Government continued to enforce 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 his or her religious convictions. The Government generally protected this right, although the newly established police force and legal system were slow to respond to allegations of criminal acts against members of minority religious groups. The Indonesian legal requirement that each citizen be a member of one of Indonesia's officially recognized religions is no longer applicable. Police cadets receive training in equal enforcement of the law and nondiscrimination, 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 association's 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 from these fees.

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

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 year (see Section III).

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 in the country, and its priests and bishops are accorded the highest respect in local society. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities generally are friendly 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. The Dili mosque remains inhabited by approximately 250–300 ethnic Malay Muslim migrants, who initially fled during the violence of September 1999. These migrants returned to the country in the 3 months after the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) took control, but they expressed fear of returning to their homes. They claim that they may face hostility if required to re-enter the community at large. Their occupation of the Dili mosque has created tensions with Muslims of Arabic descent, and in March the Government found that the majority of this group was residing illegally in the country as well as improperly occupying the mosque. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government was investigating the case and seeking a solution acceptable to all parties. Despite some press reports to the contrary, religion is not at the core of the dispute. Rather, it stems chiefly from disagreements within the Muslim community about property rights and from the disputed citizenship claims of long-time ethnic Malay residents.

In late 2003, small groups of Catholic youths repeatedly stoned the mosque in Los Palos and harassed and intimidated the small local Muslim population. The situation was resolved several weeks later after a local Catholic leader joined a senior Islamic leader from Dili in a series of public meetings in Los Palos to discuss the importance of showing mutual respect to persons of different faiths.

At times non-Catholic Christian groups also have been harassed. While there were no further attacks on Protestant churches such as those that occurred in June 2000 in Aileu district, there were credible allegations of harassment, occasionally including violent attacks, against members of Protestant denominations in the areas of Baucau, Los Palos, Ainaro, and Liquica. 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.

One case reported in 2002 involved attacks in the Liquica area on a Brazilian Protestant evangelist and local residents whom he had converted from Catholicism to Protestantism. While the authorities have investigated, no arrests have been made and petty harassment has continued.

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.

Additionally, the U.S. Government maintained a steady dialogue with Members of Parliament during their deliberations on legislation affecting religious freedom. The U.S. Government provided support to the justice sector to encourage the development of judicial institutions that will promote the rule of law and ensure respect for religious freedom as guaranteed in the Constitution. Embassy representatives met with the leaders of all major religious communities in the country to discuss religious freedom issues.

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

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

Religion runs largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous Fijians, who constitute approximately 54 percent of the population, follow Christianity; most Indo-Fijians, who constitute approximately 40 percent of the population, practice Hinduism or Islam. However, a significant minority of Indo-Fijians are Christian. Other ethnic communities include Chinese and Europeans. Approximately 60 percent of the Chinese community practice Christianity and 40 percent practice Confucianism or some form of ancestor worship. The European community is predominantly Christian.

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the role of religion continues to be a political issue. Some Methodist Church authorities and allied political groups continued to advocate the establishment of a Christian state, but the new leadership of the Methodist Church moderated somewhat the expression of strong nationalist sympathies endorsed by the previous leadership.

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 2003, unidentified persons burglarized a mosque in the western part of the country. The burglary was viewed as an isolated incident and widely condemned.

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 public diplomacy materials related to political and religious freedom across a wide spectrum of society. The Embassy continued to make religious freedom an important part of its effort to promote democracy and human rights. In an April speech to Sangam, an Indian cultural and religious organization, the Ambassador noted that attacks on religious symbols and buildings impoverished everyone in the country. The Ambassador's remarks received wide distribution in the media.

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 this right; 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 other faiths frequently experienced official discrimination, often in the context of civil registration of marriages and births or the issuance of identity cards.

Interreligious fighting re-emerged in some parts of the archipelago, most notably in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas, where the Government previously had succeeded in reducing violence between Muslims and Christians. Sectarian clashes claimed at least 46 lives in Central Sulawesi and at least 47 in the Moluccas, a slight increase from the previous period. Although some evidence indicated that outsiders might have provoked the violence, its origins remained unclear. Some members of the Christian and Muslim communities in these conflict zones alleged that members of the military and police forces either carried out or supported some attacks, but there was no conclusive evidence of this.

Terrorists and members of religious extremist groups carried out attacks during the year, including the August 2003 bombing at Jakarta's Marriott hotel that killed 12 persons and injured more than 100. Jemaah Islamiyah, a terrorist organization bent on establishing an Islamic super-state in Southeast Asia, orchestrated the attack (see Section II, Abuses by Terrorist Organizations). The Government cracked down on terrorists and other extremists who carried out attacks in the name of religion, convicting at least 79 during the period covered by this report. The Government sentenced 3 of these convicts to death in connection with the 2002 Bali nightclub bombings, which killed 202 persons. Militants from the extreme Front Betawi Rempug (FBR) and other groups physically attacked nightspots in the name of religion, claiming that the establishments were immoral. Police did not take adequate action against such militants or against those who extorted money from shopkeepers ostensibly to celebrate religious holidays. The Government failed to hold accountable some religious extremists, including many Laskar Jihad militiamen, who had committed religion-inspired crimes in previous years.

Aceh Province remained the only part of the country specifically authorized to implement Islamic law, or Shari'a, but no known criminal sanctions for violators of

Shari'a, either Muslims or non-Muslims, took place during the period covered by this report. Some 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 interreligious tolerance and cooperation occurred during the period covered by this report. Government officials together with Muslim and Christian community leaders continued to work together to diffuse tensions in conflict areas, particularly in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas. The Government tried and convicted at least 79 terror suspects and accomplices involved in religiously motivated attacks during the period covered by this report.

In October 2003, President George W. Bush met with a number of key religious figures in Bali, where he underlined U.S. respect for religious freedom as a fundamental right. The U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, the Consulate General in Surabaya, 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. The U.S. Government took a number of steps to promote religious freedom, including hosting or sponsoring interfaith conferences and seminars, distributing information through radio, newspaper, and television, and arranging exchanges related to religious freedom.

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. The BPS report indicated that 88.22 percent of the population label themselves Muslim, 5.87 percent Protestant, 3.05 percent Catholic, 1.81 percent Hindu, 0.84 percent Buddhist, and 0.2 percent "other," including traditional indigenous religions, other Christian groups, and Judaism. The 2000 census was the first attempt since 1960 to produce a complete demographic survey rather than rely on statistical sampling. 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.

Muslims constitute a majority in most regions of Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, and North Maluku. Muslims form distinct minorities in Papua, Bali, East Nusa Tenggara, and parts of North Sumatra and North Sulawesi. Most Muslims are Sunni, although some follow other branches of Islam, including the Shi'a, who number approximately 100,000 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 national "modernist" social organization, Muhammadiyah, has branches throughout the country and approximately 30 million followers. Founded in 1912, Muhammadiyah runs mosques, prayer houses, clinics, orphanages, poorhouses, schools, public libraries, and universities. On February 9, Muhammadiyah's central board and provincial chiefs agreed to endorse the presidential campaign of a former Muhammadiyah chairman. This marked the organization's first formal foray into partisan politics and generated controversy among members.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest "traditionalist" social organization, focuses on many of the same activities as Muhammadiyah and indirectly operates a majority of the country's Islamic boarding schools. Claiming approximately 40 million followers, NU is the country's largest organization and perhaps the world's largest Islamic group. Founded in 1926, NU has a nationwide presence but remains strongest in rural Java. The Islam of many NU followers has heavy infusions of Javanese culture, and followers tend to reject a literal or dogmatic interpretation of Islamic doctrine. Many NU followers give great deference to the views, interpretations, and instructions of senior NU religious figures, alternately called "Kyais" or "Ulama." The organization has long advocated religious moderation and communal harmony.

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 of this spectrum exist groups such as Hizbut 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 Ahmadiyah interpretation of Islam. However, this group maintains 242 branches throughout the country. In 1980 the Indonesian Council of Ulamas (MUI) issued a "fatwa" (a legal opinion or decree issued by an Islamic religious leader) declaring that Ahmadiyah is not a legitimate form of Islam.

In addition there are 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. In East Nusa Tenggara Province, which includes the islands of Flores and Sumba, 54 percent of residents are Roman Catholic and 34 percent Protestant. Catholics concentrate in southeast Maluku Province. Protestantism predominates in the central part of Maluku, North Maluku, and parts of Central and North Sulawesi. In Papua Protestants, who account for 60 percent of the population, predominate in the north, while Catholics are the majority in the south. Dutch colonial policy, continued by the Government after independence, divided the territory between Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Other significant Christian populations live in North Sumatra, the seat of the Batak Protestant Church. Significant Christian populations also reside in West Kalimantan (mostly Catholic), Central Kalimantan (mostly Protestant), and Java, particularly in major cities. Many urban ethnic Chinese citizens adhere to Christian faiths or combine Christianity with Buddhism or Confucianism. Smaller Christian groups include the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Internal migration has altered the demographic makeup of the country over the past 3 decades. It has increased the percentage of Muslims in predominantly Christian eastern parts of the country. By the early 1990s, Christians became a minority for the first time in some areas of the Moluccas. While 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. Regardless of its intent, the economic and political consequences of the transmigration 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, and major concentrations of Hindus also exist in Central Java, East Java, and Lampung provinces. 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. In addition 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.

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, 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 of them. Relations between the WALUBI and the KASI remained somewhat strained during the period covered by this report.

The number of adherents of Confucianism remains unclear, since the national census no longer enables respondents to identify themselves as Confucian. In 1976–1977, the last year in which the category existed, 0.7 percent of the population self-identified as Confucian. If the percentage remained constant until the period covered by this report, the total Confucian population would be more than 1.6 million. However, the percentage of practicing Confucians might well have increased, fol-

lowing the Government's lifting in 2000 of related restrictions, including 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. Most Confucians live on Java, Bangka Island, North Sumatra, North Sulawesi, West and Central Kalimantan, and North Maluku. 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.

A few dozen Jewish persons, most of non-Indonesian background, live in Surabaya, East Java, site of the nation's only synagogue (Orthodox, Sephardi). A small Jewish community also exists in Jakarta.

The Baha'i community asserted that it had thousands of members in the country, but no reliable figure exists.

Falun Gong has 2,000–3,000 followers in the country, nearly half of whom live in the Yogyakarta area, according to representatives of the group.

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 these provisions; 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, including influential social organizations such as Muhammadiyah and NU, reject the idea. Proponents of an Islamic state argued unsuccessfully in 1945 and throughout the parliamentary democracy period of the 1950s for the inclusion of language (the "Jakarta Charter") in the Constitution's preamble making it obligatory for Muslims to follow Shari'a. During the Suharto regime, the Government prohibited all advocacy of an Islamic state. With the loosening of restrictions on freedom of speech and religion that followed the fall of Suharto in 1998, proponents of the "Jakarta Charter" resumed advocacy efforts. This proved the case prior to the 2002 Annual Session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), a body that has the power to change the Constitution. The nationalist political parties, regional representatives elected by provincial legislatures, and appointed police, military, and functional representatives, who together held a majority of seats in the MPR, rejected proposals to amend the Constitution to include Shari'a, and the measure never came to a formal vote. 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 a controversial education bill signed into law in July 2003.

Shari'a generated debate and concern during the period covered by this report, and many of the issues raised touched on religious freedom. Aceh remained the only part of the country where the central Government specifically authorized Shari'a. Law 18/2001 granted Aceh special autonomy and included authority for Aceh to establish a system of Shari'a as an adjunct to, not a replacement for, national civil and criminal law. Before it could take effect, the law required the provincial legisla-

ture to approve local regulations ("qanun") incorporating Shari'a precepts into the legal code. Law 18/2001 states that the Shari'a courts would be "free from outside influence by any side." Article 25(3) states that the authority of the court will only apply to Muslims. Article 26(2) names the national Supreme Court as the court of appeal for Aceh's Shari'a courts.

During 2002, the provincial legislature approved five qanun. Local regulation No. 10/2002 grants authority to Shari'a courts "to examine, decide and resolve cases related to family, civil and criminal law." Local regulation No. 11/2002 requires the preservation of Aceh's Islamic culture, the observance of Islamic holidays, and the wearing of "Islamic dress" by Muslims. Local Regulations 12/2002, 13/2002, and 14/2002 prohibit Muslims from drinking alcoholic beverages, gambling, or being in "close proximity" with unmarried persons of the opposite sex. In March 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. Press reports indicated that since March 2003, Aceh's Shari'a courts handled 45 cases, two-thirds of which dealt with divorce or other family-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 "fiqih" 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.

Because Muslims make up the overwhelming majority of Aceh's population, the public largely accepted Shari'a, which in most cases merely regularized common social practices. For example, a majority of women in Aceh already covered their heads in public. 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. The imposition of martial law in Aceh in May 2003 had little impact on the implementation of Shari'a. The Martial Law Administration actively promoted Shari'a as a positive step toward social reconstruction and reconciliation. 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 2003), 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, or that police arrested or prosecuted anyone for Shari'a infractions. However, in early 2004, Banda Aceh's main Baiturrahman mosque established 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.

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 (Joint-Ministerial Decree No. 1/1969), the Guidelines for the Propagation of Religion (Ministerial Decision No. 70/1978), Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia (Ministerial Decision No. 20/1978), and Proselytizing Guidelines (No. 77/1978).

By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not released implementing regulations for the controversial National Education System Bill. If enforced the law would require schools to ensure that each student receives religious instruction by a teacher of the same faith as that of the student. Because few students of other faiths attend Islamic schools, those schools likely will not have to hire teachers of different faiths, institute religion classes to study other faiths, or create spaces for worship for adherents of other official recognized religions. Catholic and Protestant organizations, church groups, and schools viewed the law as state intervention into private religious affairs. Conversely, a substantial number of prominent Muslims had studied at Catholic schools in their youth and considered the lack of instruction in their own faith or a place to worship as a significant problem.

Following the education bill debate, a draft version of the Department of Religion's religious harmony bill drew harsh criticism from members of all faiths. The draft bill would recognize only the five official religions and prohibit activities that

deviate from the main teachings of the five religions. It would also prohibit attending a religious ceremony that does not reflect one's faith or celebrating a religious holy day not affiliated with one's faith. The draft bill specifies that interfaith marriages and interfaith adoptions, currently prohibited in practice because of administrative procedures, would now carry a criminal penalty of a maximum 3 years in prison. NU and Muhammadiyah joined with the Council of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) in condemning what they viewed as gross governmental interference in religious matters. Individual members of the Department of Religion continued to support the bill in public, but by the end of the period covered by this report, the Department had not finalized the bill or sent it to the legislature for consideration.

Of the more than 200 political parties in the country, 24 passed the legal threshold for participation in 2004 legislative elections. Of these, seven have direct or partial affiliation with Islam, five of which 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 (PPNUI). Former leaders of the Muhammadiyah and the NU led nationalist parties, the National Mandate Party (PAN) and the National Awakening Party (PKB) respectively, which attempted to draw on grassroots support from their former Islamic social organizations. Of the 24 parties that participated in the 2004 legislative election, 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 about 21 percent of the vote, secular 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. The Center for Mental Development oversees these facilities and programs. Each branch of the armed forces has an Agency for Mental Development chaired by a Chief of Spiritual Development. Christians often have their own prayer groups that meet on Fridays, coinciding with the Muslim prayer day. Some military officers perform this function as a voluntary additional duty, but civilian religious leaders conduct most religious services on military posts. Organized services and prayer meetings are available for members of each recognized religion. Although every military housing complex 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 Fitr, Idul Adha, the Muslim New Year, and the Prophet's Birthday. National Christian holy days are Christmas Day, 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. On 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, and in February, following the latest hajj, the Department of Religious Affairs drew sharp criticism for mismanaging the registration of approximately 30,000 prospective pilgrims after they had paid the required fees. The Government unilaterally expanded the country's quota of 205,000 pilgrims, claiming it had informal approval from the Saudi Government, an assertion that proved incorrect. Members of the House of Representatives have sponsored a bill to set up an independent institution, thus ending the department's monopoly.

A number of government officials and prominent religious and political leaders interacted during the period covered by this report with interfaith groups, including the Society for Interreligious Dialog (MADIA), the Indonesian Anti-Discrimination Movement (GANDI), the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), the

Indonesian Committee on Religion and Peace (also ICRP), the Institute for Interfaith Dialog (Interfidei), and 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 doctrine, Pancasila, declares belief in one supreme God. Atheism is not recognized; however, 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 community approved and a regional office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs provided a license. Some Protestants complained about the difficulty of obtaining community approval and alleged that in some areas, even when the Muslim community approves a new church, outside activists present 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 four Jakarta churches unfairly during the period covered by this report.

Muslims routinely reported difficulties in establishing mosques in Muslim-minority areas of Papua, West Nusa Tenggara, North Sulawesi, and elsewhere. In March Muslims in the Pondok Kelapa XI housing complex in East Jakarta reportedly complained that members of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBP) Church had established a kindergarten but used it as a worship place, having realized that local Muslim-majority residents would have objected to a church there.

The Government also restricted religious freedom by forcing elementary and secondary school students to undergo religious instruction, sometimes that of a religion other than their own. Even before the July 2003 passage of the National Education System Bill (see Legal/Policy Framework), students had to choose religious instruction from five types of classes, representing only Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

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 religions. For example, in March a court in West Jakarta refused to register the marriage of Hadi and Yunike Fong, two Confucians who wed in a traditional Confucian ceremony. Hadi Fong subsequently reported the case to the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas-HAM); the matter had not been resolved by the end of the period covered by this report. 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 religious advocacy groups urged the Government to delete the religion category from KTPs, but to little effect.

Men and women of different religions faced serious obstacles to marrying and officially registering their marriages. Such couples have 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.

Jehovah's Witnesses representatives said that although they enjoyed a high degree of religious freedom, other Christian communities in Kupang, West Timor, encouraged the local Religion Department office to deny local government recognition of the Jehovah's Witnesses community.

Followers of Falun Dafa, a group also known as Falun Gong, claimed harassment by officials of a foreign government and alleged that police prohibited them from meditating in front of that foreign embassy.

The Government continued to restrict the religious freedom of certain messianic Islamic groups. An official ban on the activities of the groups Jamaah Salamullah, Ahmadiyah, and Darul Arqam remained in effect, influenced by a 1980 fatwa by the Indonesian Council of Ulamas, or 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. In 2002 a group of religious scholars, the Indonesian People's Ulama Forum, called one of Ulil's articles an insult to Islam. They stated that according to Islam, a person who insulted Islam should face death. Police took no action against Ulil, and the religious scholars later distanced themselves from their statement, saying they had not meant that Ulil should receive a death sentence.

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.

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, although restrictions existed in conflict areas. 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. On some occasions, publications with controversial religious themes provoked outrage, such as with a comic book that circulated in 2001 that alleged Muslims would "tremble on Judgment Day." The Government did not ban any books because of their 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. While some allege a "glass ceiling" for promotion to the most senior ranks for Christians and other minorities, a Christian was recently promoted to the position of Armed Forces Chief of Staff. Additionally, a Christian serves as Chief of Staff of the Navy, and a Christian has previously 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 Aceh Province, there was concern over the implementation of Shari'a, which had been authorized by the central Government. Some, including many Muslims, expressed concern that law enforcement institutions would use new powers to interfere in private matters, including forcing persons to wear "Islamic dress." However, during the period covered by this report, there were no reported criminal sanctions for violations of Shari'a, either by Muslims or non-Muslims. Similarly, there were no reports of Shari'a being applied to Acehnese outside of the province. Deep-seated concern remained among mainstream Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and others that the implementation of Shari'a, even in one region, would undermine the country's tradition of religious tolerance and plurality.

Unlike in the previous period, there was no formal effort by Islamic political parties to adopt Shari'a through an amendment to the Constitution. However, Islamist groups and parties continued to voice their aspiration that the country adopt Shari'a.

In some municipalities across the country, local leaders applied stricter Islamic practices during the period covered by this report. 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. In some areas, Islamization campaigns that began in 2002 seemed to lose momentum. In the Madura regency of Pamekasan, the regent had set up a "local Shari'a" implementation committee and promulgated a degree calling for Muslim attire for civil servants and the cessation of public and work activities during the call to prayer. During the period covered by this report, the committee set less ambitious goals such as encouraging adherence to traffic regulations. 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, 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.

North Sumatra did not experience major interreligious violence, but some grievances arose among members of different faiths. Some non-Muslims took offense at 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.

Divorce was a legal option available to members of all religions, but Muslims who wished to seek one 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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although the Government made significant efforts to reduce interreligious 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.

Areas of Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas experienced periodic eruptions of interreligious and interethnic violence, although the fighting did not escalate to the prolonged, open warfare of the past. In Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas, and to a much lesser extent in Papua and Kalimantan, economic tensions between local or native persons (predominantly non-Muslim) and more recently arrived migrants (predominantly Muslim) contributed to incidents of interreligious and interethnic violence. These conflicts were generally not based on theological differences.

In Central Sulawesi, violence between Christians and Muslims killed at least 46 persons during the period covered by this report, compared with at least 25 during the previous 12-month span. These incidents remained unsolved. A lack of evidence inhibited attempts to determine whether and how the incidents were rooted in sectarian violence and whether or not the incidents were related to each other. On October 10 and 12, 2003, an unidentified group of gunmen attacked at least 5 villages in the districts of Poso and Morowali, killing at least 11 persons, injuring at least 13 others, and burning 38 buildings. On October 10, dozens of masked men, dressed entirely in black, raided the village of Beteleme, in Lembo subdistrict, where they killed three residents. On October 12, 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 at the end of the period covered by this report, and at least 13 suspects remained in custody.

Other interreligious attacks also occurred during this period. On April 10, two unidentified gunmen stormed into a church in Poso during an Easter sermon and interrupted the services. On March 30, unknown assailants shot and killed Reverend Freddy Wuisan behind his church in the Poso Pesisir subdistrict of Membuke. On March 29, two unidentified gunmen riding motorcycles shot and critically injured Julia Rossi Pilongo (a Christian), dean of the law faculty at Sintuwo Maroso University (UNSIMAR). On March 27, an unidentified gunman shot and killed John Tanalida as he was returning from Sayo village in the Kawua sub-district of Poso regency. Also on March 27, a bomb was found in Maleali village in Sausu district of Parigi Moutong regency. On December 29–30, 2003, four persons were killed and five injured in Poso Pesisir and Ulubongka sub-district of Poso. In November 2003, there was a bombing in Poso on the second day of Idul Fitr, an Islamic holiday.

The Government responded to the violence in Central Sulawesi by appealing for calm and mobilizing police reinforcements. However, police tactics generated heated criticism, particularly from the Muslim community, and sparked at least one riot. In November 2003, Hamid Sudin, a suspect in the previous month's violence, was fatally shot by police officers attempting to arrest him. According to the police, Hamid resisted arrest, leaving them no choice but to open fire. However, thousands of Muslim demonstrators who subsequently besieged a Poso police station believed that Hamid had been killed without warning. The demonstrators grew increasingly angry and by the day's end, three Christian residents of Poso—apparently innocent passers-by—had been killed. One victim was identified as Oranye Tajoja, the treasurer of one of Poso's biggest churches. Meanwhile, the government-brokered peace agreement known as the Malino Declaration remained in effect, but observers pointed to worrying signs, including the appearance of leaflets circulating in Poso calling for a "jihad."

In the provinces of Maluku and North Maluku, at least 47 persons were killed in violence between Christians and Muslims during the period covered by this report, up from at least 30 during the previous 12-month period. The violence shattered a period of relative calm in the Moluccas; until then, the government-brokered "Malino II" peace agreement was holding, and no major interreligious attacks had occurred. In September 2003, the Government lifted the civil emergency status in the Moluccas, and investment in the province's largest city, Ambon, started to grow.

However, on April 25 interreligious violence broke out after more than 100 members and supporters of the mostly Christian Maluku Sovereignty Front (FKM) gathered in Ambon to celebrate the anniversary of the separatist movement. Arsonists burned the offices of the U.N., along with hundreds of houses, the Nasaret Protestant Church, a Muslim school, and parts of the Christian University of Maluku. Sporadic fighting continued for approximately a week. Accurate statistics were not available, but most sources reported that the conflict left at least 40 persons dead, more than 300 injured, and several hundred buildings destroyed. Government officials claimed the violence displaced more than 10,000 persons, but the Indonesian Red Cross/Crescent cited a figure of 4,000. Snipers killed or injured several of the victims. The investigation into the identity of the instigators of the violence continued at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government responded to the fighting by removing the police commander in the Moluccas and dispatching more than 1,000 police and military reinforcements to the region. The acting Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, Hari Sabarno, reportedly warned Islamic extremists against sending combatants to the Moluccas, a call echoed by the governor of the Moluccas and also by the commander of the country's armed forces, General Endriartono Sutanto. News organizations reported that the Laskar Jihad militia planned to send thousands of Islamic fighters to the conflict zone, but such claims could not be confirmed. However, leaders of a number of extremist groups, including the FPI, Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR), the Indonesian Mujahedeen Council, and the Mer-C group, reportedly met in Jakarta and proposed sending fighters to defend Muslim neighborhoods in Ambon. On April 29, the military rejected accusations from Rev. Leo Hitijahubessy, who reported to police that he had seen soldiers burning the Nasaret church. The accuracy of the snipers and the weapons they used fueled suspicions that members of the security forces might have been involved. On April 30, military spokesman Maj. Gen. Sjafrie Syamsoeddin said that snipers may have used rifles stolen from a police armory in 2000.

Violence in and around Ambon continued throughout the month of May. On May 5, unidentified gunmen killed two persons on nearby Buru Island. On May 19, snipers fired from a speedboat and injured a fisherman off the coast of Ambon. On May 24, a bomb exploded in a Christian area of Ambon, killing one person and injuring six others. A second bomb exploded later on the same day, causing no injuries. Ambon police also found and defused a third bomb the same day. On May 25, a homemade bomb exploded in a Christian market area in Ambon, killing 1 person and injuring approximately 13 others. Ambon police successfully defused two other bombs later the same day.

Attacks on houses of worship were reported during the period covered by this report. 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. In September 2003, local residents of the West Java community of Cilaku, in Bogor regency, burned a branch of the Isa Almasih Church (GIA) because they opposed the church's presence. Similar sentiment apparently fueled a January 9 incident at a naval housing complex in the West Java community of Margahayu, Bekasi regency, where local residents destroyed a branch of the Western Indonesian Protestant Church (GPIB). On April 11, in the West Java community of Pondok Maharta, Tangerang regency, local residents demanded the closure of a branch of the Indonesian Pentecostal Church (GPDI). That case had not been resolved by the end of the period covered by this report. Christians also complained about an April 6 incident at a house in the Jakarta community of Pasar Manggis. Members of the FPI and local residents attacked the house, which was sometimes used for HKBP Church activities. It reportedly took police 4 hours to put an end to the attack. On June 7, local mobs simultaneously vandalized five churches in the outskirts of Jakarta and injured one priest. The attackers reportedly were angry because the churches were located in buildings designated as shops and had been established without the permission of the Government. on June 9 unidentified men threw Molotov cocktails at a Catholic church in Yogyakarta, Central Java, which started a small fire but caused no injuries.

One mosque attack was reported during this 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 after attacking with homemade weapons a number of local Muslims. No other attacks on mosques were reported during this period by Jakarta's Mosque Council or the Al-Fatah Mosque Foundation in Maluku Province. However, in July 2003 in the Balinese neighborhood of Dalung-Ubung, local Hindu-majority residents forcibly closed a mushollah (prayer room), having objected to its presence and claiming the Government had not approved it. It was reported that the Muslim congregation had

earlier failed to obtain permission to establish a small mosque there. The closure raised tensions, but the Government and the MUI immediately called on Muslims and non-Muslims alike to refrain from overreacting to the incident.

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. In September 2003, members of the militant FBR raided a number of Jakarta nightclubs and told their owners that the establishments were obscene and must be closed within one week. The members threatened to burn the nightclubs down if the owners failed to comply. On January 30, in an incident not linked to FBR, unidentified individuals burned down 12 small cafes reputed to be prostitution venues in Jakarta's Kemang district. In December 2003, the Islam Defenders Front (FPI), which had carried out many such attacks, reportedly announced it was setting up an "immorality watch" body to bring to justice those "in violation of God's law." FPI leader Habib Rizieq was freed from jail in November 2003 after serving a 7-month sentence for organizing nightclub attacks in Jakarta. Despite Rizieq's conviction, the Government frequently failed to take action against criminals with extremist views. Similarly, it frequently failed to protect shopkeepers, many of them Chinese Indonesians, who experienced extortion by extremists ostensibly soliciting funds for the celebration of religious holidays.

The Government took some steps to hold accountable members of the security forces implicated in crimes against humanity in the Moluccas and Central Sulawesi in previous years. Prosecutors in Ambon announced on February 21 the indictment of seven policemen for the killing of two civilians, one identified as Syaiful Ibrahim, prior to 2003. In Central Sulawesi, the Palu district court in March convicted at least five Islamic militants, including Nizam Khaleb and Fauzan Arif, for hiding caches of explosives and weapons and harboring a terrorist (see Abuses by Terrorist Organizations).

Some Christians criticized the arrest of Rev. Rinaldy Damanik, a leader of the Christian community in Central Sulawesi. Convicted of weapons possession in June 2003, Damanik appealed the decision, but a Central Sulawesi court rejected his appeal in August 2003. Some of Damanik's supporters insisted that he had been framed, or that he was persecuted for speaking out for the Christian community.

Some Christians also criticized the detention of Alex Manuputty, a Christian separatist leader sentenced in January 2003 to 3 years in prison for subversion. Manuputty, chairman of the FKM, was released from jail pending an appeal in November 2003, and he subsequently departed the country. In December the Supreme Court rejected his appeal. At the end of the period covered by this report, he had not returned to the country to serve his jail sentence. On May 1, Manuputty's wife and daughter were arrested, reportedly for involvement in the violence that broke out between largely Christian separatist supporters and the Muslim community in Ambon. At the end of period covered by this report, the two remained under police custody in Jakarta.

Some Muslims criticized the arrest and prosecution of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the head of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist group, who was convicted of immigration violations in September 2003. Police rearrested Ba'asyir in April following the completion of his jail sentence. At the end of the period covered by this report, he remained in custody pending further charges (see Abuses by Terrorist Organizations).

Other conflicts involving members of different religions occurred in various parts of the country, including disputes in Kalimantan between ethnic Madurese, who are predominantly Muslim, and indigenous Dayaks, who are predominantly Christian. However, these disputes stemmed primarily from ethnic and economic factors.

In March 2003, the Indonesian Muslim Solidarity Movement called on Jakarta police to investigate those responsible for producing and distributing Christian video compact disks that alleged that KH Zainuddin MZ, a well-known Islamic preacher, was in fact a Christian who had been baptized and whose child attended Sunday school. Zainuddin himself rejected the allegations and filed a defamation lawsuit against Protestant minister Muhammad Filemon. Police opened an investigation that was still underway at the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversions 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 were unproven reports during the period covered by this report that on the island of Seram in the Moluccas, near the city of Misohi, some former Christians who had at the height of the interreligious conflict been forced to convert to Islam were prevented from moving to another village.

Unforced conversions between faiths occur, as allowed by law, but they remain a source of controversy. Comprehensive statistics for the period covered by this report were not available. 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 the faith. Some of those who converted felt compelled not to publicize the event for family and social reasons. Widely read Islamic magazine Sabili warned readers in its July 31, 2003, edition that the nation's university campuses were becoming a hunting ground for Christians bent on converting Muslims.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

Terrorists active in the region carried out one major attack in the country during the period covered by this report. Although it was not targeted at any specific religion, the August 2003 attack on Jakarta's Marriott Hotel, which killed 12 persons and injured more than 100, was the work of JI, a group committed to creating an Islamic super-state in southeast Asia.

The Government subsequently identified, arrested, and convicted at least 15 persons responsible for that attack. These convictions were among at least 79 handed down during the period covered by this report, not only to members of JI but also of other groups of terrorists and religious extremists, including Laskar Jundullah. Among those convicted during this period were Amrozi bin Nurhasyim, Ali Ghufron bin Nurhasyim, and Abdul Aziz (Imam Samudra), all sentenced to death for their roles in planning and executing the October 2002 nightclub bombings in Bali, which killed at least 202 persons.

In October 2003,a Jakarta Court convicted Islamic terrorist Abdul Jabar of transporting and detonating a bomb that exploded in 2000 at the Jakarta residence of the Philippine Ambassador. Jabar, who was also found guilty of involvement in two church bombings on Christmas Eve 2000, received a 20-year sentence. The Government also prosecuted others implicated in the Christmas Eve bombings, which involved churches across the archipelago and left 19 persons dead. For example, on February 19, Nur Misuari was convicted in connection with the bombing of Jakarta's Santa Ana church.

At least 18 persons linked to Islamic extremist or terrorist groups were convicted during this period for a December 2002 restaurant bombing in Makassar, South Sulawesi, which killed three persons and injured 15 others. One of the convicted persons, Wirahudi, received a 19-year sentence.

In September 2003, JI leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir was found guilty by a Jakarta court of participating in seditious acts and immigration violations and sentenced to 4 years in prison. An appellate court overturned the sedition conviction in December 2003 and reduced the sentence to 3 years. In March 2003, the Supreme Court overturned the appellate court decision, found Ba'asyir guilty of entering and leaving the country illegally and of document fraud, and further reduced his sentence to 18 months. On April 30, police re-arrested Ba'asyir when his prison sentence expired and were investigating him on charges of terrorism at the end of the period covered by this report.

On May 26, Ferry Silalahi, a Palu prosecutor, was shot and killed in his car by unknown gunmen. Ferry handled various corruption and terrorist cases, including a recent case against an alleged JI member. At the end of the period covered by this report, police were investigating to determine if there was a connection between the murder of Ferry and the terrorist case he prosecuted.

Renewed sectarian violence in Ambon in April and May prompted public threats by Laskar Jihad leader Jafar Umar Thalib to send LJ fighters to Ambon to protect Muslims there. However, there were no confirmed reports of fighters traveling to Ambon or of the group reconstituting itself.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 17 President Magawati Soekarnoputri stated that religious teaching should not generate militant and fanatic persons who tend to antagonize and make enemies of other religious groups.

In May the Indonesian Human Rights Commission and the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace sponsored a discussion on "Restructuring the Relations between State and Religion." The participants raised the issues of broadening the number of government-recognized religions and limiting the Government's influence on regulating religious practices.

Although the Government at times failed to hold accountable individuals who had fostered or carried out religious violence, it took action against terror suspects involved in religiously motivated attacks. The Government tried and convicted at least

79 terror suspects and accomplices during the period covered by this report and sentenced 3 Bali bombers to death. Police arrested at least 15 suspects in the August 5 bombing of Jakarta's Marriott Hotel, which killed 12 persons. More than 27 trials of terror suspects were underway at the end of the period covered by this report. No new related laws or regulations were introduced during the period covered by this report, although efforts to revise the Counter-Terrorism Law continued.

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 called for religious leaders to promote mutual respect and cooperation. Although spasms of interethnic violence gripped both regions during the period covered by this report, many residents of both the Christian and Muslim communities found common ground.

On February 25 in Central Sulawesi, at least 100 Muslim residents of Poso regency, grouped under the Association of Poso Muslim Families (FKKMP), visited Christian communities in the Tentena, North Pamona subdistrict, in an effort to promote peace and interreligious harmony. On March 11, a similar visit was held, welcomed by local Christians with a traditional ceremony.

In September 2003 in the Moluccas capital of Ambon, thousands of Muslim and Christian Ambonese gathered to celebrate the 48th anniversary of the city's founding. In North Sumatra, where interreligious relations remained generally harmonious in spite of the 2000 Medan church bombing and 1998 ethnic rioting, the Forum for Open Communication among Religions (FKPA) brought together local religious leaders for weekly meetings. FKPA, which like the Forum for Communal Harmony (FORKALA) was created by Governor Teungku Rizal Nurdin, also organized interreligious patrols to guard mosques and churches at times of potential turbulence. On May 3, after a new outbreak of violence, National Police Chief Da'i Bachtiar, along with Muslim preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar and Indonesian Communion of Churches chairman Nathan Setiabudi, traveled to Ambon to meet with community leaders.

Following the Bali bombings of 2002, Muslim leaders increasingly spoke out against radicals within the Islamic community. After the bombing of Jakarta's JW Marriott Hotel in August 2003, NU and Muhammadiyah issued a joint statement condemning the attack.

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 (pesantrens and madrassas), and community prayer rooms (mushollahs) all grew. Muslim-only housing estates attracted more attention. Bookshops did a brisk trade in fiction with Islamic themes, and Koranic 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—a greeting seldom heard at such events in years past and a practice resented by some non-Muslims.

The use of Islamic headscarves, or "jilbab," grew more popular, particularly among younger women. Motivations were myriad—some wore jilbab 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 physically demonstrate their piety. Islamic banking gained popularity during the period covered by this report but still accounted for only a tiny percentage of depositors. A major bank's Shari'a branch in the Sumatran city of Medan saw its total deposits at the branch quadruple in 2003. In December the MUI issued a fatwa declaring interest on money forbidden under Islamic law. Under this fatwa, the country's Muslims would be prohibited from using conventional banks once Shari'a banks were operating in their neighborhoods. The effect of the fatwa as not clear, having no impact in populous East Java, for example. Muhammadiyah and NU immediately disputed the MUI's statement, saying the fatwa should be viewed as no more than an advisory opinion. Following these strong and well-publicized dissents, MUI leaders modified the fatwa, as they had after issuing a similar decree 3 years earlier.

In general Islam in the country remained overwhelmingly tolerant, with a pluralistic outlook. In May 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.

With the removal of Suharto-era restrictions on religious organizations and expression, there have been some public calls by a minority of Muslims for the cre-

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

In 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, interreligious relations were generally good in Papua.

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

Many Muslims and Christians in the Moluccas and Central Sulawesi worked together to repair mosques and churches damaged in the past. In Bali, where some feared that the 2002 bombings would strain relations between the island's Hindu majority and Muslim minority, no such confrontations have been reported. On the first anniversary of that attack, Muslim, Hindu and Christian leaders participated in a memorial service.

Interfaith organizations remained active during the period covered by this report and attracted media coverage. Among them were the Society for Interreligious Dialog (MADIA), the Indonesia Anti-Discrimination Movement (GANDI), the Interfidei, the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), and the Indonesian Committee on Religion and Peace (also called ICRP), the Indonesian Peace Forum (INFID), and the Institute of Gender and Religious Studies. 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 what they perceived as the growing influence of fundamentalism by participating in dialogue via Internet, radio, newspaper, and television, and paid visits to institutes of higher learning.

The country's varied, freewheeling, and mostly free media influenced societal attitudes. There were no radical broadcasters on television. Al Jazeera was shown from 12 p.m. to 4 a.m. on one network during the invasion of Iraq, but the station later dropped the contract because of lack of viewer interest. (Al-Jazeera and five other international stations were available on cable in Jakarta, which has very limited viewership.) Among mainstream publications, most provided relatively accurate and objective coverage, though some sensationalist or Islamist publications printed prejudicial or inaccurate stories. The nation's largest-circulation news magazine was Sabili, a radical Islamic publication. Disinformation campaigns, frequently through e-mail and cellular phone text messages, occurred on a number of occasions during the period covered by this report. Some believed that radical Islamic groups orchestrated these activities in an attempt to portray the United States as carrying out a secret campaign to undermine Islam and replace it with a Christian or Jewish system.

SECTION IV: U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

President George W. Bush visited Bali in October 2003 and met with prominent leaders from the Muslim, Christian, and Hindu communities. The U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, the Consulate General in Surabaya, 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.

The Embassy continued to expand its outreach to the Muslim community and to emphasize the importance of religious freedom in a democratic society. The Embassy arranged four speaking tours throughout the country for U.S. scholars to address religious tolerance and human rights issues. The Consortium of Pesantrens for Voter Education received a grant to inform pesantren students about the relation of religious freedom to democracy. The Indonesian Community for Pesantren and Community Development received funds to produce a radio talk show series on the subject of "Islam, Democracy and Pluralism."

The Embassy regularly distributed information on religious freedom and religious tolerance in the U.S. through radio, newspaper, and television. The Embassy placed 98 programs on 13 television stations, ranging from 1-hour documentaries to 2-minute news features, on topics such as Islam in America and President Bush's Iftaar dinner. Books and pamphlets distributed to the public included 40,000 copies of "Muslim Life in America" and 400,000 copies of "Democracy Papers." At the launch of the translated version of a 5-volume series of books, the American Outline Series, with 7 different seminars on "Pluralism in the U.S. and Indonesia," 15,000 copies were distributed to religiously affiliated organizations.

The Embassy sponsored over 100 religious scholars, religious leaders, human rights activists, students, and journalists to travel to the U.S. and participate in programs related to religious freedom. Topics included Religious Freedom and Tolerance, Interreligious Dialogue, Conflict Management and Tolerance Promotion, and Educational Development.

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. Ten of the country's institutions of higher education, five of which are Islamic universities, have established "American Corners"—small program and information centers that provide computers with Internet access and reference materials about American life, including religious topics.

The U.S. Government funded activities conducted by Islamic and non-Muslim civil society organizations that promoted religious tolerance, democracy, and gender equality. For example, partner organizations continued to work with Baku Bae Maluku, a local NGO, to evaluate efforts of Muslim and Christian lawyers in the Moluccas to resolve communal conflicts and with Desantara, another local NGO, to ensure the protection of religious minorities in Cigugur, West Java, and to prevent religious conflict there.

JAPAN

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 145,884 square miles, and its population is an estimated 127 million. Regular participation in formal religious activities by the public is low, and accurately determining the proportions of adherents to specific religions is difficult. According to statistics published by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in December 2002, approximately 49.9 percent of citizens adhered to Shintoism, 44.2 percent to Buddhism, 5.0 percent to "other" religions, and 0.9 percent to Christianity. However, Shintoism and Buddhism are not mutually exclusive religions, and the figures do not represent the ratio of actual practitioners; most members claim to observe both. "Other" faiths include both local chapters of international religions, such as the Unification Church of Japan and the Church of Scientology, as well as faiths founded in the country, such as Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, Perfect Liberty, and Risho Koseikai. A small segment of the population, predominantly foreign-born residents, attend Orthodox, Jewish, and Islamic services.

There are 28 Buddhist schools recognized by the Government under the 1951 Religious Corporation Law. The major Buddhist schools are Tendai, Shingon, Joudo, Zen, Nichiren, and Nara. In addition to traditional Buddhist orders, there are a

number of Buddhist lay organizations, including the Soka Gakkai, which has more than 8 million members. The three main schools of Shintoism are Jinja, Kyoha, and Shinkyoha. Among Christians, Catholic and Protestant denominations have modest followings.

According to an April 2001 Justice Ministry report, the Aum Shinrikyo group, which lost its religious status following its 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, was renamed Aleph and had an estimated 1,650 followers, a decrease from 10,000 in 1995. However, in October 2002, Aum Shinrikyo/Aleph claimed to have only 1,208 members.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

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

The Government does not require that religious groups be registered or licensed; however, to receive official recognition as a religious organization, which brings tax benefits and other advantages, a group must register as a "religious corporation." In practice, almost all religious groups register. The Cultural Affairs Agency listed 182,634 registered religious groups as of December 2002.

There are no known restrictions on proselytizing.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Aum Shinrikyo/Aleph group remained subject to the January 2003 decision by the Public Security Examination Commission that concluded the group still posed a danger to society and declared the group should continue under government surveillance for 3 more years.

Members of the Unification Church and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to allege that police do not act in response to allegations of forced deprogramming of church members. They claim that police do not enforce the laws against kidnapping when the victim is held by family members and that Unification Church members are subjected to prolonged detention by family members and deprogrammers, whom the police do not charge. By its own calculation, the Unification Church claims that kidnapping and deprogramming has declined significantly in recent years. It remains concerned, however, by the tendency of officials to judge kidnapping and deprogramming by victim's family members and deprogrammers as a family matter.

In August 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 kidnappers for kidnapping and "deprogramming." In the Unification Church's case, the court determined that the causes of the appeal were not matters involving a violation of the Constitution. In January, the Yokohama district court ruled in favor of the defendant in a 1997 case in which two victims allege they were kidnapped and held in several apartments for nearly 5 months. The court cited a lack of evidence and peaceful conditions in captivity as reasons for the judgment. Also in January, however, the Osaka district court ruled in favor of a victim who claimed to have been abducted by her family in 2001 with the help of deprogrammers and held against her will for 2 months. Her parents and one deprogrammer were ordered to pay $2,000 (200,000 yen).

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

The Mormons, the Council of World Missions, and the Seventh-day Adventists have 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 or politically dominant religion. The Government does not favor a particular religion, nor are there separate categories for different religions.

Christmas, Easter, and National Gospel Day are official holidays.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted as 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, is a dominant social and cultural force, but there are amicable relations among the country's religions.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government 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 severely repressed unauthorized religious groups in recent years; there are unconfirmed reports of the killing of members of underground Christian churches. In addition religious persons who proselytize or who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating in the People's Republic of China (PRC) appear subject to arrest and harsh penalties, according to several unconfirmed reports. In the late 1980s, there was some easing of religious discrimination policies, and government-sponsored religious groups that were established at that time continued to operate. 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 a total 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 at 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. There has been a limited revival of Buddhism with the translation and publication of Buddhist scriptures that had been carved on 80,000 wooden blocks and kept at the Haeinsa temple in the Republic of Korea. It is not known whether any Catholic priests, whose role is vital for the practice of the Catholic faith, remain in the country. 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.

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 attend 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 during the period covered by this report 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 have visited the country in recent years, including papal representatives, the Reverend Billy Graham, and religious delegations from the Republic of Korea, the United States, and other countries. Vatican representatives, including Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Vatican Undersecretary for Relations with States, visited the country in 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 has been operating a factory in the Najin-Sonbong Free Trade Zone since 1998 to produce food for preschool children. A noodle factory established by contributions from Catholics of the Seoul Archdiocese opened in 2001. The Unification Church, which has business ventures in the country, is constructing an interfaith religious facility in Pyongyang and has announced plans to build a welfare center.

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. In 2002 Kim Jong Il visited the Ryangchon Buddhist temple in South Hamgyong Province. His comments during the visit centered on preserving the country's cultural relics.

In September 2003, construction reportedly was completed of the Pyongyang Theological Academy, a graduate institution that trains pastors and evangelists. In addition there were reports that the Russian Orthodox Church was building a church in Pyongyang.

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 activity except that 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.

During and immediately after the Korean War of 1950–53, the Government identified large numbers of religiously active persons as "counterrevolutionaries," and many of them were killed or imprisoned in concentration camps. The peak of this oppression was in the early 1970s, when a constitutional revision added a clause regarding "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, and visits by foreign religious figures have increased. However, the Government appears to have continued to persecute unauthorized religious groups in recent years. In particular, religious persons who proselytize or who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating across the border with China appear to have been arrested and subjected to harsh punishment, according to several unconfirmed reports. A constitutional change in 1992 deleted the clause regarding freedom of antireligious propaganda, authorized religious gatherings, and provided for "the right to build buildings for religious use."

Efforts at national reconciliation have increased North-South contacts. Civic groups and religious organizations in the Republic of Korea have been active in efforts to promote inter-Korean reconciliation. Discussions between these groups and their northern counterparts generally have been limited to promoting social and cultural exchanges. The effect of these contacts 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. A Protestant seminary was reopened in 2000 with assistance from foreign missionary groups. Critics, including at least one foreign sponsor, charged that the Government opened the seminary only to facilitate reception of assistance funds from foreign faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). 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

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

Persons engaging in religious proselytizing may be arrested and subjected to harsh punishment, including imprisonment, prolonged detention without charge, torture, or execution. The Government appears concerned that faith-based South Korean relief and refugee assistance efforts along the northeast border of the PRC may become entwined with 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.

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" in the country. 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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government deals harshly with all opponents, including those engaging in religious practices deemed unacceptable to the regime. Religious and human rights groups outside of the country have provided numerous, usually unconfirmed, reports that members of underground churches have been beaten, arrested, tortured, or

killed because of their religious beliefs. Defectors interviewed by a former humanitarian aid worker claimed that Christians were imprisoned and tortured for reading the Bible and talking about God, and that some Christians were subjected to biological warfare experiments. The Government effectively bars outside observers from confirming these reports. However, the collective weight of anecdotal evidence over the years of harsh treatment of unauthorized religious activity lends credence to such reports.

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

There is no reliable information on the number of religious detainees or prisoners, but there are unconfirmed reports that 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, 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 U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, and both he and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom raised awareness of the deplorable human rights conditions in the country through speeches before U.S. audiences.

The U.S. Government worked to achieve passage of a resolution on the human rights situation in the country, as well as the DPRK's deplorable record on religious freedom, during the 60th session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The resolution condemned the Government for its human rights abuses, including the use of torture and forced labor, as well as restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. The resolution called on the Government to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments to which it is a party, invite U.N. special representatives to visit the country, and ensure that humanitarian organizations have free access to the country. The resolution also called for the appointment of a U.N. Special Rapporteur for the country.

The U.S. Government provided the National Endowment for Democracy with $250,000 in 2002–03 for subgrants to two South Korean NGOs to support monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions in the country. 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.

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 a total area of 38,023 square miles, and its population is approximately 48 million. According to the 1995 government survey (when the population was 44,600,000), the country's major religions and the number of adherents of each at that time were: Buddhism, 10,321,012; Protestantism, 8,760,336; Roman Catholicism, 2,950,730; Confucianism, 210,927; Won Buddhism, 86,923; and other religions, 267,996. There were 21,593,000 citizens who did not practice any religion. While the population has increased since 1995, the percentage of adherents of each faith has remained approximately the same in recent years. The next survey will be conducted in 2005.

No official figures are available for the number of adherents 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 105 orders. The Catholic Church has 18 dioceses, including 1 based in Seoul. There are 170 Protestant denominations, including the Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches, and the Korean Gospel Church Assembly.

Among those practicing a faith, 41.7 percent reported that they attended religious services or rituals at a temple or church at least once per week. Six percent responded that they attended religious services 2 to 3 times per month; 9.4 percent attended once per month; 6.8 percent attended once every 2 to 3 months; 26.9 percent attended once per year; and 9.2 percent did not attend services. Among practicing Buddhists, 1.2 percent responded that they attended religious services. A total of 71.5 percent of Protestants and 60.4 percent of Catholics responded that they attended religious services.

There are approximately 180 Protestant and 6 Catholic missionary groups operating in the country. The Protestant groups include: Christians in Action, Korea; the Church of the Nazarene, Korea Mission; the Overseas Mission Fellowship; World Opportunities International, Korea Branch; World Vision; Global Mission Partnership; and Serving In-Land Mission. Among the Catholic missionary groups are the Missionaries of Guadeloupe, the Prado Sisters, and the Little Brothers of Jesus.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. 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. To protect cultural properties such as Buddhist temples, in 1987 the Government instituted the Traditional Temples Preservation Law. In accordance with this law, Buddhist temples receive some subsidies from the Government for their preservation and upkeep.

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

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

The Religious Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism takes the lead in organizing groups such as the Korea Religious Council and the Council for Peaceful Religions to promote interfaith 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. However, the issue of conscientious objectors is being debated by the public and in the courts. On May 21, the Seoul District Court, in an unprecedented decision, acquitted three conscientious objectors of criminal charges. Separately, the Constitutional Court is deliberating over a petition submitted in 2002 that seeks a ruling on whether the country's conscription law violates the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of religion. According to the Justice Ministry, at the end of the period covered by this report, 387 persons, most of whom are Jehovah's Witnesses, were imprisoned (serving sentences or awaiting trial in prison) for refusing to serve their military duty. They are allowed to conduct their own religious services in prison.

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 leaders regularly meet both privately and under government auspices to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. These meetings are given wide and favorable coverage by the media.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials also meet regularly with members of various religious communities to discuss issues related to human rights.

LAOS

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

In most parts of the country, officials respected the rights of members of all faiths to worship, but within constraints imposed by the Government. Authorities in some areas, however, continued to display intolerance for minority religious practice, particularly Christian. 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 2002 LFNC-drafted decree on religious practice (Decree 92) is the principle legal instrument establishing rules for religious practice. Although this decree was in part responsible for an improved climate of religious tolerance, authorities used its many conditionalities to restrict some aspects of religious practice. Most fundamentally, Decree 92 institutionalizes the Government's role as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities. During the period covered by this report, there were reports of local officials pressuring minority Christians to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages. There were also several instances of persons detained or arrested for their religious faith. The most prominent of these cases occurred in Savannakhet and Attapeu provinces. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were two known religious prisoners, both members of the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC), the country's domestic Protestant Christian church. During the period, authorities closed one church in Savannakhet Province.

There were generally amicable relations among the various religious groups, although differences in religious beliefs among villagers have led to tensions. Conflicts between ethnic groups have sometimes exacerbated religious tensions. The efforts of some Protestant congregations to separate from the LEC have 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 and the LPRP. The Embassy sought to encourage greater religious tolerance through dialogue, for example by organizing a seminar on religious freedom 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 a total area of approximately 85,000 square miles, and its estimated population is approximately 5.9 million. Almost all ethnic or "lowland" Lao are followers of Theravada Buddhism; however, lowland Lao probably constitute no more than 40 percent of the country's population. Most non-Lao, who are members of at least 47 distinct ethnic groups, are practitioners of animism, with beliefs that vary greatly between groups. Animists are also found among Lao Theung (mid-slope dwelling) and Lao Soung (highland) minority tribes. Among lowland Lao, 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 life as a monk in a temple, even if only for a few days. There are approximately 22,000 monks in the country, nearly 9,000 of whom have attained the rank of "senior monk," indicating years of study in a temple. In addition there are approximately 450 nuns, generally older women who are widowed, resident in temples throughout the country. The Buddhist Church is under the direction of a Supreme Patriarch who resides in Vientiane and supervises the activities of the Church's central office, the Ho Thammasapha.

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

In Vientiane there are four Mahayana Buddhist pagodas, two serving the Lao-Vietnamese community and two serving the Lao-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. Buddhist nuns reportedly serve some of these pagodas.

The Roman Catholic Church has 30,000 to 40,000 adherents, many of whom are ethnic Vietnamese, concentrated in major urban centers along the Mekong River 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. However, the Catholic Church's activities are circumscribed in the north, and a once-thriving Catholic community in Luang Prabang Province is moribund. There are three bishops, located in Vientiane, Thakhek, and Pakse, who were able to visit Rome to confer with church officials. A fourth bishop, assigned to the northern part of the country, has been unable to take up his post in Luang Prabang. The Church's property there was seized after 1975 and there is no longer a parsonage in that city; the bishop remains in residence in Vientiane. 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 approximately 60,000, but actual numbers may be significantly higher. 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 and Bokeo provinces.

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. Other denominations active in the country are Methodists and Jehovah's Witnesses, both of which have sought official government approval for their activities. Although in theory the Prime Minister's Decree on Religious Practice provides a mechanism for new religious denominations to register, the Government's desire to consolidate religious practice for control purposes has effectively blocked registration of new denominations. New guidelines issued by the LFNC in early 2004 required 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, and denominations that have sought registration have expressed concerns about being forced to cease activities, but authorities have made no attempt to interfere in the activities of these "independent" churches.

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

The Baha'i Faith has more than 1,200 adherents and 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. 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 level authorities in particular sometimes violated this right. Article 30 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, Article 9 discourages all acts that create divisions

among religions and persons, which the LPRP and the Government interpret restrictively and consequently inhibit religious practice by all persons, especially those belonging to minority religions. Although official pronouncements accept the existence of different religions, they emphasize the potential to divide, distract, or destabilize. Moreover, many local officials, as well as some senior officials in the Government and the LPRP, appear to interpret Article 9 as justification to prohibit proselytizing and to discourage religious conversions, especially to Christianity.

The absence of rule of law has created an atmosphere in which authorities may act with impunity against persons regarded as threats to social order. Persons arrested for their religious activities have been charged with exaggerated security or other criminal offenses. Persons detained may be held for lengthy periods without trial. Court judges, not juries, decide guilt or innocence in court cases, and an accused person's defense rights are limited. A person arrested or convicted for religious offenses has little protection under the law. All religious groups, including Buddhists, practice their faith in an atmosphere in which 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 and the LPRP.

In 2002, the Prime Minister's Office issued Prime Minister's Decree 92 on the Administration and Protection of Religious Practice in an attempt to establish clear rules on the rights and obligations of religious faiths. 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.

Although 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, the qualification that all such activities must receive LFNC approval effectively allows the Government to impose restrictions on religious practice.

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 frequently in the activities of minority religious groups, particularly Christians, whose practices the authorities felt did not promote national interests or whose activities authorities saw as demonstrating disloyalty to the Government or to the Communist Party.

Although the State is secular in both name and practice, members of the LPRP and governmental institutions monitor Theravada Buddhism, which is practiced by the majority of the ethnic Lao population. The Government's observation, control of the clergy, training support, and oversight of temples and other facilities give Theravada Buddhism the status of an unofficial national religion. Many persons regard Buddhism as both an integral part of the national culture and as a way of life. The increasing incorporation of Buddhist ritual and ceremony in State functions reflects the elevated status of Buddhism in Lao 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 killing infants 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, at least one 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, anticipating her resurrection. Some sources have reported the spread of the Chinese-origin "Eastern Lightning" group in some areas in the north.

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.

All persons in the Islamic community appear able to practice their faith openly, freely attending the two active mosques. Daily prayers and the weekly Jumaat prayer on Fridays proceed unobstructed, and all Islamic celebrations are allowed. Muslims are permitted to go on the hajj. Groups that conduct Tabligh teachings for the faithful come from Thailand once or twice per year. During the period covered by

this report, the Government more closely scrutinized the activities of the small Muslim population but did not interfere with the community's religious activities.

The small Seventh-day Adventist Church, confined to a handful of congregations in Vientiane and in Bokeo Province, has reported no government interference in its activities in recent years, and its members appear to be free to practice their faith. The Baha'i spiritual assemblies in Vientiane and Savannakhet cities have practiced freely, but smaller communities in Khammouane and Savannakhet provinces have faced restrictions from local authorities. 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 is free to send a delegation 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. 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. The Government 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, although on occasion local officials 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, with Protestants continuing 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 Party. As a result of the Government's decentralization policy that diffuses power to provinces and districts, it is difficult for central authorities to control or mitigate the harsh measures taken by some local or provincial authorities against members of minority religious denominations. However, the LFNC at times used its offices to mitigate the arbitrary behavior of local officials in some areas where harassment of Christian religious minorities had been most severe. Since 2003, the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department has generally avoided becoming involved in local religious controversies, encouraging local or provincial governments to resolve conflicts on their own and in accordance with Decree 92.

In general the larger urban areas such as Vientiane, Thakhek, Pakse, and Savannakhet cities experienced little or no overt religious abuse, and local church congregations reported an improved atmosphere of religious tolerance. 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. Even in these areas, 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, many 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 closed churches, and 5 or 6 of Savannakhet's approximately 40 churches remained closed at the end of the period covered by this report. Moreover, in 2003 officials closed one longstanding LEC church in Khamsan village in Savannakhet—local LEC Christians and formerly-Christian Buddhists both claimed ownership of the property—and turned down requests by the small LEC congregation there to reopen the church.

In January, officials in Kengkok, Savannakhet Province, returned to the LEC congregation a church that had been seized by village officials in 1999 for use as a kin-

dergarten. The church reopened and at the end of the period covered by this report was freely conducting religious services. To replace the village kindergarten, the U.S.-based NGO Institute for Global Engagement mobilized funds to construct a new facility.

As many as 200 of the LEC's nearly 300 congregations do not have permanent church edifices 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 have not always been forthcoming in authorizing the 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, including facilities in Vientiane. The Baha'i congregation in Savannakhet's Dong Bang village also was denied permission 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. Since March the LFNC has required all Protestant groups to become a part of the LEC and has not allowed other Protestant churches to operate openly other than the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Nonetheless, there are some practicing Protestant congregations that are not associated with the LEC, and many of them openly conducted services with the knowledge of local authorities.

The authorities remained suspicious of patrons of religious communities other than Buddhism, especially Christian groups, in part because these faiths do not share the high degree of direction and incorporation into the government structure that Theravada Buddhism does. Some authorities criticized Christianity as a Western or imperialist "import" into the country. In the past decade, the LEC has 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, active proselytizing on the part of some of its members, and its independence of government control all have contributed to the Government's and the LPRP's suspicion of the Church's activities. Some authorities also have interpreted Christian teachings of obedience to God as signifying disloyalty to the Government and Party. The membership of the LEC comprises mostly members of ethnic Mon-Khmer tribes and the Hmong, two groups that historically have resisted central government control, which has contributed to the Government's and the LPRP's distrust of the LEC.

Local officials restricted the celebration of major Christian holidays by a small number of congregations. In Attapeu Province, officials arrested 11 Christians gathering for Christmas prayer services in Done Phai and Khang villages, reportedly because the groups had gathered in violation of a district prohibition of their worship services during the Christmas period. Other than these cases, 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.

The Catholic Church has experienced little overt harassment in recent years, but longstanding restrictions on its operations in the north have shut down the once-thriving Catholic community in Luang Prabang and have left only a handful of small congregations in Sayaboury, Bokeo, and Luang Namtha. Because the Catholic Church's property in Luang Prabang was seized after the creation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975, the Church owns no parsonage in that city and the Bishop of Luang Prabang has remained in Vientiane. Authorities continued to restrict the bishop's travel to his diocese. 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. In the central and southern parts of the country, Catholic congregations were able to practice their religion freely.

The Government prohibits foreigners from proselytizing, although it permits foreign NGOs with religious affiliations to work in the country. Foreigners caught distributing religious material may be arrested or deported. In June four foreign tourists distributing video compact discs (VCDs) with Christian religious content were expelled from the country; officials stated that they were expelled for conducting business activities in violation of their tourist visa status. Decree 92 specifically authorizes proselytizing by Lao citizens, providing the LFNC approves the activity. In spite of this provision, many authorities continued to interpret proselytizing as an illegal activity and sometimes seized religious tracts and teaching material from Lao

Christians entering the country from abroad. Nevertheless, many religious followers proselytized, resulting in conversions.

Although Decree 92 authorizes the printing of non-Buddhist religious texts and allows religious material to be imported from abroad, it also requires permission for such activities from the LFNC. In practice the LFNC has not authorized Christian denominations to print their own religious material, including Bibles. Some religious material is brought into the country by believers; however, these persons face possible arrest. Because of these restrictions, some approved Christian congregations have 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 refuses travel permission to persons going abroad for what it regards as suspect activities. There is no evidence that the Government has investigated travelers upon their return to the country from abroad.

Until recently, government-issued identity cards reported the religious affiliation of all adult citizens. Newly issued cards do not specify religion, nor is religious denomination specified in family "household registers" or in passports, two other important forms of identification. On occasion authorities have withheld new ID cards or household registers from Christians because of their religious beliefs. Incidents of officials threatening to withhold official documentation unless Christians renounced their faith occurred in scattered villages in Houaphanh, Luang Prabang, Luang Namtha, and Savannakhet provinces.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities continued to arrest persons for their religious activities. Most detentions that occurred during the period covered by this report were short, varying from a few days to a few weeks. The greatest number of detainees at one time, including those sentenced and also those arrested and detained without sentence, was approximately 25. Twenty-one of these were ethnic Brou Christians under loose detention in Savannakhet Province. Nine of the detainees were released in July 2003; 12 others were held until October, just before the visit to the country of the U.S. Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were two religious prisoners, both in Oudomsai Province. Conditions in prisons were harsh; like other prisoners, religious detainees suffered from inadequate food rations, lack of medical care, and cramped quarters.

There were several reports that authorities arrested or detained persons, often without charge, because they either held or attended unauthorized religious services. Beginning in October 2003, on several occasions police in Khamsan, Savannakhet Province, detained small numbers of worshippers at the LEC church, holding them for several days at a time and forcing them to pay fines. In December 2003, Khamsan authorities detained nine LEC members attending a Sunday worship service. LEC members claimed the police detained the group for holding "unauthorized" worship services. The nine were released several days later. In the same month, police in Attapeu Province detained 11 LEC members in Khang, Donephai, and Somsuk villages of Sanamsai district, ostensibly for possessing "poisons." Provincial officials later reported that the 11 were found to have chemical pesticides that aroused the suspicion of authorities. The arrested Christians, however, reported that police told them they were being detained for "disturbing the peace" by holding unauthorized worship services, a story supported by documentation the authorities issued to the Christians. The detainees were released several days later, but one was subsequently rearrested in March and released from detention 2 weeks afterwards. In April and May, authorities in Phin district of Savannakhet Province arrested 12 ethnic Brou LEC Christians for religious activities. On May 28, they were released from detention.

In August 2003, an LEC member in Attapeu Province was murdered near his home and his body buried in a shallow grave. Although no arrests were made in connection with the case, some witnesses claimed to have seen police taking Somphong away just prior to his murder.

In 1999 two members, Nyoht and Thongchanh, of the Lao Evangelical Church in Oudomxai Province were arrested and charged 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.

Late in 2003, authorities in Phongsaly Province released long-term religious prisoner Phiasong, who had been held for several years without trial for his religious activities.

In most provinces, the preponderance of arrests has been of religious leaders and the most active and visible proselytizers rather than practitioners in general. Despite the end of a formal renunciation campaign, local officials also continued to threaten congregations and believers with arrest. Although officials generally took no action, such threats had a chilling effect on religious practice.

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, but not to the same degree as in the past. In some cases, officials threatened religious minorities with arrest or expulsion from their villages if they did not comply, but these threats were rarely acted on. Officials in Attapeu Province's Sanamsai district used threats of arrest, expulsion, and death to coerce LEC members in the district to give up their faith. At least one member of the LEC community was expelled from the province. In several cases, authorities seized the livestock of Christians who refused to renounce their faith. Following growing international attention, pressure on Christians in this province diminished markedly. Christians in the ethnic Hmong village of Nam Kata in Bolikhamsai Province relocated to another part of the province as a result of pressure from local officials and non-Christian villagers who saw their Christian faith as a threat to traditional animist beliefs. In early 2004, officials in Ban Nam Thuam village of Luang Prabang Province threatened arrest and confiscation of ID cards to force LEC members in that village to give up Christianity but did not act on these threats. Christian communities in Houaphanh and Luang Namtha provinces and in the Saisomboun Special Zone on occasion also were threatened by officials with various forms of punishment if they did not give up Christianity, but these threats were not carried out. In May and June, more than a dozen LEC Christian families in Savannakhet Province's Dong Nongkhun and Yang Soung villages were threatened with "problems" with household registration and possible expulsion if they did not give up their religion.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of forced renunciations involving profane rituals such as drinking animal blood, which had allegedly taken place in some areas between 1999 and 2001.

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 its Christian minorities, was for the most part marked by improvements from past years, but with continued intolerance in some areas.

In its official pronouncements, the Government advocated conciliation and equality between religious faiths, and in practice it displayed greater tolerance for the LEC. The LFNC was the lead government organ for promoting greater tolerance of the LEC's activities, but after the publication of Decree 92 in 2002, the LFNC exhorted local officials to resolve conflicts between followers of different religions in accordance with the decree rather than seek LFNC intervention. The LFNC continued to instruct local officials on religious tolerance. Officials from the LFNC made frequent trips to provinces where Christians' rights had been violated to instruct local officials on the need for greater tolerance of Christian congregation activities. The LFNC cooperated with the U.S. Embassy in organizing a first-ever seminar on religious freedom issues in February, aimed at senior district and provincial officials as well as officials from the central Government in Vientiane. Officials from the LFNC and from the U.S.-based Institute for Global Engagement conducted the seminar sessions. The LEC also contributed to the improved climate through an aggressive program of public service, providing developmental assistance and organizing social welfare projects in several areas that had previously experienced religious intolerance.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The various religious communities coexist amicably; society places importance on harmonious relations, and the dominant Buddhist faith generally is tolerant of other

religious practices. There is no ecumenical movement, but the LEC and LFNC have taken the lead in trying to organize an ecumenical body aimed at improving understanding and cooperation between faiths. 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 to participate in Buddhist or animist religious ceremonies.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Ambassador addressed the issue of religious freedom with government leaders at the most senior levels. The Ambassador wrote directly to provincial governors and senior central government officials seeking their intervention in numerous cases of infringements on religious freedom, which in most instances led to immediate corrective action. The Ambassador also routinely raised the issue with provincial officials during his frequent visits to regions outside the capital. The Ambassador visited several areas that experienced religious intolerance, including Bolikhamsai, Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Xieng Khouang provinces, and spoke to provincial governors about the state of religious freedom in those areas. The Deputy Chief of Mission traveled to Attapeu, Champassak, and Savannakhet provinces to discuss religious freedom issues with provincial officials and assess the situation in those areas. 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. As part of this dialogue, 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 of the 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.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom met with senior Lao officials on religious freedom in the capital and visited areas of Vientiane Province where instances of intolerance toward Christian minorities had occurred. 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, the IGE president traveled to LEC communities in Attapeu, Champassak, and Savannakhet provinces and donated funds for the construction of a kindergarten in Savannakhet. The Embassy actively encourages such high-level visits as the most effective tool available for eliciting greater respect for religious freedom from the Government.

MALAYSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government placed some restrictions on this right. Sunni Islam is the official religion, and the practice of non-Sunni Islamic beliefs is significantly restricted. Non-Muslims are 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 believers in various religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government maintained an active dialogue with leaders and representatives of various religious groups. The U.S. Embassy sponsored several major events to discuss religious freedom. In 2003, Embassy officials protested anti-Semitic language used by then-Prime Minister Mahathir during his address to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Kuala Lumpur.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 127,000 square miles and a population of approximately 25 million. According to 2000 census figures, approximately 60.4 percent of the population were Muslim; 19.2 percent practiced Buddhism; 9.1 percent Christianity; 6.3 percent Hinduism; and 2.6 percent Confucianism, Taoism,

and other traditional Chinese religions. The remainder was accounted for by other faiths, including animism, Sikhism, and Baha'i.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, it recognizes Islam as the country's official religion and the practice of Islamic beliefs other than Sunni Islam is significantly restricted. The Government provides financial support to an Islamic religious establishment and also provides more-limited funds to non-Islamic communities. State governments impose Islamic religious law on Muslims in some 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 among Malaysians contributed to his March election victory over the opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), which advocates a stricter Islamic agenda.

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.

For Muslim children, religious education according to a government-approved curriculum is compulsory in public schools. Private schools are free to offer a non-Islamic religious curriculum as an option for non-Muslims. Non-Muslim students are required to take non-religious morals and ethics education. There are no restrictions on home instruction. In 2002, the Government suspended an annual grant to 260 privately run Muslim religious schools on grounds that the students were being instructed to oppose the Government.

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

In 2002 and 2003, the National Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) initiated interfaith dialogues aimed at promoting better understanding and respect among the country's religious groups. Participants included representatives from the Malaysian Islamic Development Department, the Malaysian Ulama Association, and the MCCBCHS.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In practice Muslims are not permitted to convert to another religion. In several recent rulings, secular courts have ceded jurisdiction to the Islamic courts in matters involving conversion to or from Islam. In 2001, a High Court judge rejected the application of a woman who converted to Christianity and requested that the term "Islam" be removed from her identity card. The judge held that the Islamic court had jurisdiction in the application. In 2000, an Islamic court sentenced four persons to 3-year prison terms for not recanting their alleged heretical beliefs and "return[ing] to the true teachings of Islam." The court rejected their argument that they were not subject to Islamic (Shari'a) law because they had ceased to be Muslims. Dismissing their appeal, the Court of Appeal ruled in 2002 that only the Islamic court is qualified to determine whether a Muslim has become an apostate. The case is pending a final decision in the Federal Court.

In a 2004 ruling, 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 said the ruling "tramples over the rights of non-Muslim parents." The mother filed an appeal, which was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

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

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 Islamic party 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 the opposition Islamic party some government-affiliated imams have been banned from speaking. These decisions vary from state to state.

In 2002, the Government began enforcing a requirement that all Muslim civil servants attend religious classes taught by government-approved teachers.

Proselytizing of Muslims by members of other religions is strictly prohibited, although proselytizing of non-Muslims faces no obstacles. The Government discourages but does not ban the distribution in the peninsular portion of the country of Malay-language translations of the Bible, Christian tapes, and other printed materials. The distribution of Malay-language Christian materials faces few restrictions in East Malaysia. In 2003, the Government briefly banned a Bible, translated into the language of the indigenous Iban in Sarawak, on the grounds that the Bible's use of the Islamic phrase "Allah Taala" (Almighty God) could create confusion among Muslims. However, the acting prime minister quickly lifted the ban following the addition of a cross to the cover of the Iban Bible.

In recent years, visas for foreign clergy have not been restricted. While representatives of non-Muslim groups do not sit on the immigration committee that approves visa requests, the MCCBCHS is 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, but generally it respects non-Muslims' right of worship.

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. Unregistered houses of worship may be demolished.

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

State governments in Kelantan and Terengganu have made efforts to restrict Muslim women's dress. In Kelantan, 120 Muslim women were fined in 2002 for not adhering to the dress code. In 2000, the Terengganu state government introduced a dress code for government employees designed to "protect the image of Muslim women and to promote Islam as a way of life." State governments in Kelantan and Terengganu specifically focused on the dress code for Muslim women while encouraging non-Muslim women to dress "modestly." Since the defeat of the opposition Islamic party in Terengganu and their near defeat in Kelantan during the national elections in March, these two state governments appear to have backed away from enforcing dress codes for any women, Muslim or otherwise.

In the March 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 strict form of Islam promoted by the Islamic party.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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

The Government is concerned that "deviationist" teachings could 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." The Selangor Religious Department detained 66 members of a "deviationist" group in 2003 and arrested 96 followers of another "deviationist" sect in April. In 2002, the Government revealed that the Malaysian Islamic Development Department "rehabilitated" hundreds of followers from 125 "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 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.

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 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 October 2003, then-Prime Minister Mahathir used anti-Semitic language during his address to the OIC in Kuala Lumpur. Mahathir's remarks about Jews at the OIC meeting drew international condemnation. Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, who succeeded Mahathir 2 weeks after the OIC speech, subsequently emphasized religious tolerance toward 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 maintained an active dialogue with leaders and representatives of various religious groups. The Embassy also sponsored several major events to discuss these issues. One such seminar on "Islam and Human Rights" underscored the connection of key human rights with Islamic values. Focusing on the role of religions and the shared challenges faced in multireligious societies, the Embassy sponsored a conference on religious diversity in the United States and Asia. The U.S. Government also funded a seminar featuring an Islamic perspective on the challenges to women in the 21st century, in which both conservative and liberal Muslims presented papers on the impact of Shari'a law on justice for women. This seminar attracted over 200 participants.

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

leaders believe to consist of Muslims, the Salvation Army, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

There are foreign missionaries from the Mormons, Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Baptist Church, and other groups. Only Mormons and members of 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.

There are three Christian-based religious holidays: Good Friday, Gospel Day, and Christmas. These holidays do not negatively affect any religious groups.

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there ramifications 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 nondenominational 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. Nonbelievers, who constitute a very small percentage of the residents, do not suffer discrimination. Governmental and social functions typically begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister, cleric, or church official.

Under President Amata Kabua during the early 1990s, the Government mandated the establishment of a National Council of Churches, which representatives of all faiths were invited to join. This group still exists in name, but largely has been inactive.

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

Most immigrants are Filipino Catholics who join local Catholic churches.

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Foreign missionary groups operate without hindrance in all four states.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

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

MONGOLIA

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 604,250 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.75 million. Buddhism and the country's traditions are tied closely, and it appears likely that almost all ethnic Mongolians (93 percent of the population) practice some form of Buddhism. Lamaist Buddhism of the Tibetan variety is the traditional and dominant religion.

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

Kazakhs, most of whom are Muslim, are the largest of the ethnic minorities, constituting approximately 4 percent of the population nationwide and 85 percent of the population of the western province, Bayan-Olgiy. The Kazahks' status as the majority ethnic group in Bayan-Olgiy was established in the former Socialist period and continues in much the same circumstances. 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 in the country, including Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, and members of some Protestant denominations. There are no nationwide statistics on the number of Christians in the country. The number of citizens who practice Christianity in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, is approximately 24,000, or 0.3 percent of the registered population of the city.

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Although there is no state religion, traditionalists believe that Buddhism is the "natural religion" of the country. The Government has contributed to the restoration of several Buddhist sites that are important religious, historical, and cultural centers. The Government 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, list of leaders or officers, brief biographic information on the person conducting religious services, and number of worshippers. While the Ministry is responsible for registrations, local assemblies have the authority to approve applications at the local level.

Under the law, the Government may supervise and limit the number of places of worship and clergy for organized religions; however, there were no reports of this during the period covered by this report. The registration process is decentralized with several layers of bureaucracy, in which officials sometimes demand payments in exchange for authorization. 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 279 registered places of worship in the country, including 172 Buddhist, 95 Christian, 5 Baha'i, 4 Muslim, and other organizations. Ten new Christian churches were registered in Ulaanbaatar in the first half of 2004. Some

of these organizations had been active and pursuing registration since 1994. Contacts with coreligionists outside the country are allowed.

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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, there has been some friction between Christian missionary groups and citizens, because in the past humanitarian assistance was accompanied by proselytizing activity. Some conservatives have criticized foreign influences on youth and children, including foreign religions and the use of incentives to attract believers.

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 as well as with government officials at the national and local level.

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

During the period covered by this report, Embassy officers continued to discuss registration requirements with NGOs as well as officials at the local and national level.

NAURU

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

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

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

Many foreign workers in the country's phosphate industry practice faiths different from those of native-born citizens. Both the 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; however, Nauru Protestant Church officials hold influential positions in both the Government and the NPC.

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 (that is, to build churches, hold religious services in the multinational facility owned by the NPC, and otherwise freely practice 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 did not respond either to the original request or to follow-up inquiries. As of the end of the period covered by this report, officials of Jehovah's Witnesses had not submitted a request for registration.

Christmas and Easter are official holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government has prevented officials of both Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons from visiting the country in their official capacity and on occasion has prevented them from visiting the country at all. While in the country, these officials have been prevented from 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.

On two occasions, the Government detained visiting Mormon officials and confiscated their passports and airline tickets. On the first occasion, in January 2001, an immigration officer informed the church officials as they were attempting to leave the country that they were in violation of the requirement that a citizen spon-

sor their visit, and that their passports were being taken for photocopying. However, on the second occasion, in May 2002, no such explanation was given; in that instance, church officials had obtained the required sponsorship and visas. Intervention of a senior immigration official was required in both instances before the passports were returned and the officials were allowed to leave the country. In May 2003, visiting Mormon officials were allowed to enter and exit the country, in an unofficial capacity, without incident.

There is a multidenominational religious facility for foreign phosphate workers in the area known as Location; however, Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses are not permitted to use this facility for religious services or meetings. Members of both of these religious groups, who are drawn largely from the Filipino, 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 members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

NEW ZEALAND

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with a total area of approximately 99,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.0 million. The religious composition of the country is predominantly Christian, but diversity continues to increase. According to 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 decline in membership between 1996 and 2001, while the Roman Catholic Church showed a slight increase. Anglicans remain the largest Christian denomination, with 15 percent of the population in 2001. The Maori Christian churches, including Ratana and Ringatu, grew significantly; Ratana grew by 34 per-

cent and Ringatu grew by 84 percent between 1996 and 2001. After experiencing growth of 55 percent between 1991 and 1996, the number of Pentecostals declined by approximately 19 percent between 1996 and 2001, to less than 1 percent of the population. During the same period, non-Christian religions continued to show strong growth rates, driven primarily by immigration. From a low base, the number of Sikhs increased by 538 percent to 5,199, and the Rastafarians increased by 122 percent to 1,296. Other non-Christian groups increased as well: Taoists by 97 percent, Muslims by 73 percent, Hindus by 53 percent, and Buddhists by 47 percent. Hindus and Buddhists each account for approximately 1 percent of the population; other non-Christian religions each account for less than 1 percent. More than 38 percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation (26.76 percent), objected to answering questions about religious affiliation (6.23 percent), or declined to state a religious affiliation (5.51 percent).

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

The Auckland statistical area, which accounts for roughly 30 percent of the country's total population, exhibits the greatest religious diversity. Further 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 maintains that in practice religious instruction, if it occurs at a particular school, usually is scheduled after normal school hours.

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In August 2003, the Human Rights Review Tribunal settled a case where a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was made to work on his Sabbath over a period of 20 years. The employer paid a fine and must in the future accommodate the individual's religious beliefs by not requiring him to work on Saturday.

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, police do not maintain data on crimes that may have been motivated by religion.

In April the Afghan and Somali Muslim communities hosted a conference to explain Islam and separate the religion from its stereotype of conflict and terrorism. The conference also sought to educate government workers about the cultural and religious issues facing Muslim immigrants.

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

PALAU

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government 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 a total land 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, and approximately 65 percent of the population are members. Other religions with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church (approximately 2,000 members), the Seventh-day Adventists (approximately 1,000 members), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (approximately 300 members), and Jehovah's Witnesses (approximately 70 members). Modekngei, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has about 800 adherents. There also is a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims in the country and a primarily Catholic Filipino labor force (approximately 3,700 persons). A large percentage of citizens do not practice their faith actively.

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

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

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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. Embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities in the country.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with a total area of 280,773 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.4 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 reportedly 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 pre-Christian traditional indigenous practices.

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

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

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

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

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 of some established churches and some individuals have questioned publicly whether such activity is desirable. Some persons have proposed legislation to limit such activity. However, the courts and government practice have upheld the constitutional right to freedom of speech, thought, and belief, and no legislation to curb those rights has been adopted.

One religious authority stated that there occasionally is isolated, localized opposition to certain religious groups not traditional to a given area. For example, Muslims are subject to sporadic minor attacks such as small fires at or in the only mosque in the country. However, such tension passes quickly and without violence.

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 Ambassador continued discussions with the Council of Churches and individual church leaders throughout the period covered by this report. The Ambassador and Embassy officials met with religious leaders to discuss their role in social issues and continue 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. Adherents of all faiths are free to exercise their religious beliefs in all parts of the country without government interference or restriction. However, socioeconomic disparity between the Christian majority and the Muslim minority has contributed to persistent conflict in certain provinces. The principal remaining armed insurgent Muslim group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), continues to seek greater autonomy or an independent Islamic state. The Government and the MILF currently maintain a yearlong cease-fire with both sides planning to continue their peace dialogue brokered by neighboring Malaysia. An eventual peace settlement will likely include special recognition of Islamic (madrassa) education and Shari'a law, among other pro-Muslim provisions.

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 has led some Muslims to seek a degree of political autonomy for Muslims in the southwestern part of the country. The once-largest Muslim insurgent group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), signed a peace accord with the Government in 1996, resulting in a strengthened Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 115,831 square miles, and its population is approximately 84 million. Over 81 percent of citizens claim membership in the Roman Catholic Church, according to the official 2000 census data on religious preference. Other Christian denominations together comprise approximately 8.9 million, or 11.6 percent of the population. Muslims total 5 percent of the population and Buddhists 0.08 percent. Indigenous and other religious traditions comprise 1.7 percent of the population of those surveyed. Atheists and persons who did not designate a religious preference account for 0.5 percent of the population.

Some Muslim scholars argue that census takers in 2000 significantly undercounted the number of Muslims because of security concerns in Muslim-majority areas of western Mindanao, preventing them from 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 anywhere from 8 to 12 percent of the population. Muslims reside principally in Mindanao and nearby islands and are the largest single minority religious group.

Among the numerous Protestant and other Christian denominations are Seventh-day Adventists, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Assemblies of God, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Philippine (Southern) Baptist denominations. In addition there are three churches established by local religious leaders: The 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 the country's indigenous peoples, estimated 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. Members of the Muslim community are concentrated in

five provinces of western Mindanao, the only provinces in which they represent the majority: Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. Large Muslim communities are also located in 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.

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The law requires organized religions to register with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and with the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to establish their 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. Older religious corporations are required to submit a 5-year financial statement, while new groups are given a 3-year provisional tax exemption. 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, supervises 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 February approximately 3,000 of the country's Muslims participated in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

The ARMM, established in 1990, responded to Muslim demands for local autonomy in areas where Muslims represent a majority or a substantial minority. In 1996, the Government signed a final peace agreement with the MNLF, concluding an often violent struggle that lasted more than 20 years. The Government is working with MNLF leaders on a variety of development programs to reintegrate former MNLF fighters through providing them with jobs and business opportunities. The integration of ex-MNLF fighters into the armed forces and police has helped reduce suspicion between Christians and Muslims.

In response to the 1996 peace agreement between the Government and the MNLF, the U.N. enacted the Multi-Donor Program (UNMDP). By the end of the period covered by this report, this program had not officially commenced since it was in a 3-month succession phase. Discussions are ongoing in preparation for the next phase of the project.

In March, peace advocates, military troops, and government officials declared Jolo municipality in Sulu province a zone of peace under the 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 note 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 Government permits religious instruction in public schools with the written consent of parents, provided there is no cost to the Government. Based on a traditional policy of promoting moral education, local public schools make available to church groups the opportunity to teach moral values during school hours. Attendance is not mandatory, and various churches rotate in sharing classroom space. The Government also allows interested groups to distribute free Bibles in public schools.

According to the 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 2001, the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) announced plans to erect a mosque on campus to provide Muslim cadets a place to worship and to enhance cultural awareness of Islam for all cadets; however, this project had not yet been completed by the end of the period covered by this report.

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 madrassas (Islamic schools) across the country vary widely; government officials estimate the number at over 2,000. Of these, more than half are located in the ARMM. To date 1,140 madrassas seeking financial assistance from local and foreign donors are registered with the Office on Muslim Affairs, while only 35 are registered with the Department of Education (DepEd). Most madrassas do not meet the DepEd's accreditation standards for curricula and adequate facilities. On February 18, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Executive Order No. 283 that provides for the creation of the Madrassa Development Coordinating Committee (MDCC) tasked to manage financial assistance to the madrassa system from local and international sources.

During the 2002–03 school year, the Government announced a program to integrate madrassas into the country's national education system. The five-point program includes information and communications technology, madrassa education, peace education, Mindanao culture and history, and teacher training. It initially involved madrassas in the ARMM, with the intention of eventually expanding to all Mindanao provinces.

To propagate the moderate teachings of Islam as opposed to the extremist positions of radical Muslim groups, a 2-day International Ulama (Islamic religious leader) Forum was held in Manila in May. The conference aimed to create a Center for Moderate Muslims to showcase Islam as a religion of peace, harmony, tolerance, and understanding. Activities of the Center would include discussions on the fundamentals of Islamic faith, producing educational materials, and public awareness campaigns. Approximately 10 top-ranking ulama officials in Mindanao, 50 ulama leaders from Luzon, 10 Muslim women religious leaders, and 30 foreign ulamas from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Cambodia, and Japan participated in the forum.

The Government's National Ecumenical Consultative Committee (NECCOM) fosters interfaith dialogue among the major religious groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, Islam, Iglesia ni Cristo, the Philippine Independent Church (Aglipayan), and Protestant denominations. The Protestant churches 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 religious holidays include Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, All Saints Day, and Christmas Day.

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. Muslims, who are concentrated in many of the most impoverished provinces in the country, complain that the Government has not made sufficient efforts to pro-

mote 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 cite the lack of proportional Muslim representation in national government institutions. After the May 10 national elections, Muslims held 10 seats in the 235 member House of Representatives.

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 31, 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.

In March, Muslim leaders within the Government and the private sector objected to the proposal of the Philippine National Police (PNP) to adopt an identification system exclusively for Filipino Muslims, which they regarded as discriminatory. PNP responded that a Muslim group voluntarily proposed the adoption of an identification system for all Muslim residents in Metro Manila as a means to identify suspected terrorists and criminals who are seeking refuge in Muslim communities. A Muslim community leader noted that there is no similar scheme for Christians. The plan had not been implemented as of the end of the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) claims to seek the immediate establishment of an independent Islamic state in the southwestern region. The ASG is primarily a loose collection of criminal-terrorist and kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and mainstream Muslim leaders reject its religious affiliation and strongly criticize 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 has 300 to 400 members, which is lower than in previous years.

In June, security forces found and defused a bomb outside a Catholic church in Manila. Authorities arrested three suspects and believe the crime was driven by opposition to the presidential inauguration, not by religious or discriminatory motives. Two similar bombs were found a day earlier at political and military locations.

In April, following a series of illegal raids of Muslim communities and arrests reportedly without warrants, some 4,000 Muslims held a prayer vigil and protest march 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 tagging 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.

In April, in line with the Government's antiterrorism campaign, the President ordered 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.

According to March press reports, a military official claimed that Christians who had converted to Islam were the vanguard of terrorist activities in Metro Manila, Mindanao, and other parts of the country and had links with the ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah, an Indonesia-based terrorist group.

In March, the five-member Commission tasked by the President to investigate the March 2003 Davao Airport bombing and the April 2003 Wharf bombing cleared the antikidnapping chief and a military officer who some suspected of being involved in the incident. The Commission also dismissed allegations against the MILF in the bombings.

In March 2003, a group of Muslim villagers complained of government-sponsored religious abuse when AFP soldiers flagged down their bus, demanded to know whether Muslims were aboard, and allegedly accused some passengers of being members of the MILF.

President Arroyo briefly declared a "state of lawlessness" in Basilan in 2001 and gave the military power to detain suspected ASG members and supporters for 36 hours without an arrest warrant. In early 2002, the military detained 73 Muslim individuals under this authority. As of the end of the period covered by this report, all 73 remained in detention with their cases pending. Several human rights groups maintain that the detainees are innocent civilians who have been targeted because they are 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

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report; however, the Abu Sayyaf Group has employed jihadist rhetoric in its public statements and claimed responsibility for the Superferry 14 explosion in February.

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 Muslims view Christian proselytizing as an extension of a historical effort by the Christian majority to deprive Muslims of their homeland and cultural identity, as well as of their religion. Christian missionaries work in most parts of western Mindanao, often within Muslim communities. Predominantly Muslim provinces in Mindanao continue to lag behind the rest of the island in almost all aspects of socioeconomic development.

The national culture, with its emphasis on familial, tribal, and regional loyalties, often creates informal barriers whereby access to jobs or resources is provided first to those of one's own family or group. Some employers have a biased expectation that Muslims have lower educational levels. Muslims report that they have difficulty renting rooms in boarding houses or being hired for retail work if they use their real name or wear distinctive Muslim dress. Therefore, some Muslims 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.

Sectarian violence is rare in Mindanao even though the cleavage between Christians and Muslims is exacerbated by the fact that the country is predominately Christian. Christians and Muslims remain suspicious of one another, although relations are not overtly hostile. In general, societal attitudes toward 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 NGO, includes Roman Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant church 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 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 all 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 nonofficial organizations. The leadership of human rights groups, trade union confederations, and industry associations typically represent many religious persuasions.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers in Manila meet with representatives of all major faiths to discuss their concerns on a variety of issues. In addition the U.S. Government actively supports the Government's peace process with Muslim insurgents in Mindanao, which has the potential to contribute to peace and a better climate for interfaith cooperation.

The Embassy also maintains active outreach with NGOs. The Embassy hosted meetings of political and opinion leaders from the Muslim community to discuss the past, present, and future U.S. role in Mindanao. The Embassy continues to engage host country communities outside Manila. In November 2003, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner at his residence during Ramadan. In December 2003, Embassy officials traveled to Mindanao to host a dinner for Muslim Ulamas (scholars) and hear their concerns about peace and religious freedom.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) helps consolidate peace efforts in Mindanao and expand economic opportunities for residents of the island. During the period covered by this report, it budgeted $40 million in grant assistance (approximately 58 percent of its total budget), targeting the poorest regions of Muslim Mindanao. USAID operates the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) program, and as well as the Livelihood Enhancement and Peace Program. GEM aims to foster peace in Mindanao, accelerate economic growth, specifically in conflict-affected areas, and support conflict resolution mechanisms. The Livelihood Enhancement and Peace Program assists in re-integrating 25,000 former Muslim combatants into the agricultural sector.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy sent Muslim and Catholic leaders to the United States on International Visitor Program Grants. The 2003 International Visitor Program, in addition to promoting interfaith dialogues, examines how religious organizations and faiths work in the United States with each other. The Philippine International Visitor Alumni Association established its own working group focusing on peace and Muslim-Christian relations.

The Embassy provided small-grant assistance to various interfaith dialogue initiatives and promoted similar themes in its speakers program. Programs to foster interfaith dialogue included a 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 interethnic cooperation. Also, the Partnerships for Learning Youth Exchange and Study (P4L YES) Program brought 40 Muslim students to the United States for a year of academic study. There they could learn about U.S. society and develop leadership skills, as well as educate Americans on their culture and establish a common bond between Muslim communities. In addition an NGO received a U.S. Embassy small grant to hold discussions on Islamic culture in the country and its relationship with democracy. In September 2003, two representatives from the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy in Washington, D.C., traveled to Marawi City, Mindanao to discuss how Muslims in the United States support democracy and democratic principals, such as freedom of religion.

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 comprises two major islands that have a total area of approximately 1,000 square miles. According to government statistics, the population was approximately 199,000 as of December 2003. 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 Church, 35 percent; Catholic, 20 percent; Methodist, 15 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 13 percent; and Assembly of God, 7 percent. These statistics reflect recent rapid 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 Christian denominations, as well as 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 no reports of avowed atheists. This distribution of church members is reflected throughout the population, but individual villages, particularly small ones, may have only one or two of the major churches represented.

Foreign nationals and immigrants practice the same religions as native-born (Western) Samoans. There are no sizable foreign national or immigrant groups, with the exception of U.S. 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." Nevertheless, although Christianity is favored constitutionally, there is no official or state denomination.

There are no requirements for the recognition of a religious group or for licenses or registration. Missionaries operate freely, either as part of one of the established churches, or by conducting independent revival meetings.

The Constitution provides freedom from unwanted religious indoctrination in schools but gives each denomination or religion the right to establish its own schools; these provisions are adhered to in practice. There are both religious and public schools; the public schools do not have religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Pastoral schools in most villages provide religious instruction following school hours.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, the day after White Sunday, 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.

Although the Constitution grants each person the right to change religion or belief and to worship or teach religion alone or with others, in practice the matai (village chiefs) often choose the religious denomination of the aiga (extended family). In previous years, despite constitutional protections, village councils—in the name of maintaining social harmony within the village—sometimes banished or punished families that did not adhere to the prevailing religious belief in the village. However, civil courts take precedence over village councils, and courts have ordered families readmitted to the village. The 1990 Village Fono Act gives legal recognition to the decisions of the fono (village councils) and provides for limited recourse of appeal to the Lands and Titles Courts and to the Supreme Court. In 2000, the Supreme

Court ruled that the Village Fono Act could not be used to infringe upon villagers' freedom of religion, speech, assembly, or association. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that villages banished persons due to their practicing religion differently from that practiced by the village majority.

In February, the Lands and Titles Court ordered the village council of Salamumu to readmit 3 families, comprising about 80 persons, who were banned from the village in 1998 for organizing Bible study classes with the intention of establishing a new church there. The families returned to Salamumu in February and have been living in the village since then without incident. The Court's order was the latest in a series of judicial decisions in recent years that affirmed that all laws, whether statutory or customary, are subject to the individual rights provided for in the constitution.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

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 Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The Government does not tolerate speech or actions that 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 a total area of 254 square miles, and its total population is approximately 4 million, of whom 3.3 million are citizens or permanent residents. According to 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 approximately 4 percent is Hindu. The remainder are adherents of other religions, agnostics, or atheists. Among Christians, the majority of whom are ethnic Chinese, Protestants outnumber Roman Catholics by slightly more than two to one. There are also small Sikh, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Jain communities.

Approximately 77 percent of the population is ethnic Chinese, approximately 14 percent is ethnic Malay, and approximately 8 percent is 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 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.

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) set up under the Administration of Muslim Law Act. The MUIS advises the Government on concerns of the Muslim community, has some regulatory functions over Muslim religious matters, and oversees a mosque building fund financed by voluntary payroll deductions.

The Constitution acknowledges ethnic Malays as "the indigenous people of Singapore" and charges the Government to support and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and language interests.

The Presidential Council on Minority Rights examines all pending bills to ensure that they do not disadvantage a particular group. It also reports to the Government on matters affecting any racial or religious community and investigates complaints.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

There is one official holiday for each major religion in the country: Hari Raya Haji for Muslims, Christmas for Christians, Deepavali for Hindus, and Vesak Day for Buddhists.

The Government does not promote interfaith understanding directly; however, it sponsors activities to promote interethnic harmony, and because the primary ethnic minorities each are predominantly of one faith, government programs to promote ethnic harmony have implications for interfaith relations. 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; now there are approximately 2,000. Although the Court of Appeals in 1996 upheld the rights of members of Jehovah's Witnesses to profess, practice, and propagate their religious belief, and the Government does not arrest members 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 Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, which was prompted by actions that the Government perceived as threats to religious harmony, including aggressive and "insensitive" proselytizing and "the mixing of religion and politics," allows the Government to restrain leaders and members of religious groups and institutions from carrying out political activities, "exciting disaffection against" the Government, creating "ill will" between religious groups, or carrying out subversive activities. The act also prohibits judicial review of its enforcement or of any possible denial of rights arising from it.

The Presidential Council on Religious Harmony reports to the Minister for Home Affairs on matters affecting the maintenance of religious harmony that are referred

to the council by the Minister or by Parliament. The council also considers and makes recommendations to the Minister on restraining orders referred to the council by the Minister. Such orders are directed at individuals to restrain them from causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill will, or hostility among various religious groups or to restrain them from mixing religion with politics. The orders place individuals on notice that they should not repeat such acts, and advise them that failure to comply would result in prosecution in a court of law.

The Government does not tolerate speech or actions, including ostensibly religious speech or action, that affect racial and religious harmony and sometimes issues restraining orders barring persons from taking part in such activities.

Missionaries, with the exception of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and representatives of the Unification Church, are permitted to work and to publish and distribute religious texts. However, while the Government does not prohibit evangelical activities, in practice it discourages activities that might upset the balance of intercommunal relations. In the period covered by this report, authorities did not detain any members of Jehovah's Witnesses for proselytizing.

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 person 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.

In 2003, the authorities seized Jehovah's Witnesses' literature on 30 occasions from individuals attempting to cross the Malaysia-Singapore land border. In 13 cases, authorities warned Jehovah's Witnesses but did not press charges. The other 17 cases remain open. At the end of the period covered by this report, 11 individuals were detained briefly for attempting to bring Jehovah's Witnesses publications into the country. The literature was confiscated, but no charges had been filed.

During the period covered by this report, two Jehovah's Witnesses students were suspended for failure to sing the national anthem and participate in the flag ceremony. Letters received by their parents stated clearly that they were welcome to return to school if they were willing to sing the anthem and salute the flag. In April 2001, a public school teacher, also a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, resigned after being threatened with dismissal for refusing to participate in singing the national anthem.

In October 1999, the Government proposed compulsory education for all children, which prompted concern from the Malay/Muslim community regarding the fate of madrassas (Islamic religious schools). In response the Government exempted madrassa students from compulsory attendance in national schools when the legislation was enacted in October 2000. However, madrassas were given 8 years from the time the law went into effect to achieve minimum academic standards or they would no longer be allowed to teach core secular subjects such as science, mathematics, and English. Compulsory education began with the school term that started in January 2003.

The debate over the "tudung" (woman's headscarf) continued. In early 2002, three female Muslim secondary school students were suspended from public schools for continuing to wear the tudung in violation of school uniform requirements. A fourth girl's parents withdrew her from school over the same issue. The girls' parents objected to the suspensions and filed a lawsuit. The lawsuit was later withdrawn. In February 2002, an opposition leader criticized the Government's ban on wearing of tudungs in public schools during a speech at "Speakers' Corner," which occupies a portion of a public park. He continued despite a police warning that the speech violated the venue's restrictions against discussing sensitive ethnic or religious issues in public. In July 2002, he was convicted of violating the Public Entertainment and Meetings Act and was fined $1,765 (S$3,000); fines over $1,176 (S$2,000) automatically bar a person from seeking public office for 5 years.

The Women's Charter, enacted in 1961, gives women, among other rights, the right to own property, conduct trade, and receive divorce settlements. Muslim women enjoy most of the rights and protections of the Women's Charter; however, for the most part, Muslim marriage law falls under the administration of the Muslim Law Act, which empowers the Shari'a court to oversee such matters. Those laws allow Muslim men to practice polygyny. Requests to take additional wives may be refused by the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which solicits the views of existing wives and reviews the financial capability of the husband. Of the approximately 4,000 Muslim marriages registered in 2001, only 20 were polygynous.

At the end of the period covered by this report, there were 21 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. There were no known conscientious objectors other than members of Jehovah's Witnesses during the period covered by this report. The initial sentence for failure to comply with the military service requirement is 15 months' imprisonment, to which 24 months are added upon a second refusal. Subsequent failures to perform required annual military reserve duty result in 40-day sentences; a 12-month sentence is usual after four such refusals.

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 non-Malays regarding the Malay community and by Malays regarding the non-Malay community 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 a total area of 11,599 square miles, and its population is approximately 450,000. Most citizens are members of Christian churches. The Anglican, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist denominations are represented. Traditional indigenous religious believers, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, account for approximately 5 percent of the population. Other groups, such as the Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and indigenous churches that have broken away from traditional Christian churches, account for another 2 percent. There are believed to be members of additional world religions within the foreign community who are free to practice their religion, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies. According to the most recent census figures, there are 12 Muslims in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Department of Home and Cultural Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterizes this role, on the one hand, as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free

expression and, on the other hand, 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 Government also pays the salaries of most teachers and health staff in the national education system.

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. However, 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.

Christianity was brought to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries by missionaries representing several Western churches: the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the London Missionary Society (which became the United Church). Some foreign missionaries continue to work in the country. However, with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy is approximately 50 percent indigenous, the clergy of the other traditional churches is nearly entirely indigenous. Traditional church missionaries are represented by religions such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the United Church (Methodist), the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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 May 2003, an Australian Seventh-day Adventist missionary was killed in Malaita; police arrested one of two suspects in the case. There was no evidence that these killings were related to the victims' religious affiliation.

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.

THAILAND

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it does not register new religious groups that have not been accepted into one of the existing religious governing bodies on doctrinal or other grounds. In practice unregistered religious organizations operate freely, and the Government's policy of not recognizing any new religious faiths has not restricted the activities of unregistered religious groups. The Government officially limits the number of foreign missionaries that may work in the country, although 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.

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 approximately 198,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 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 3,425 registered mosques in 61 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, Christians constitute approximately 0.8 percent (486,800) 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 six tribal groups (chao khao) recognized by the Government, with an estimated population from 500,000 to 600,000 persons. Syncretistic practices drawn from Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and ethnic Tai spirit worship are common. The Sikh Council of Thailand estimates the Sikh community to have a population of approximately 50,000 persons, mostly residing 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, there were approximately 3,220 Dhammaduta working in the country. In addition the Government sponsored the international travel of another 982 Buddhist monks sent by their temples to disseminate religious information abroad. Christian and Muslim organizations also reported having small numbers of citizens working as missionaries in the country and abroad.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it restricts the activities of some groups. The Constitution requires that the monarch be a Buddhist. The state religion in effect is Theravada Buddhism; however, it is not designated as such.

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 Education, registers religious organizations. Under the provisions of the Religious Organizations Act, the RAD recognizes a new religion if a national census shows that it has at least 5,000 adherents, has a uniquely recognizable theology, and is not politically active. 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 maintained a policy of not recognizing any new religious faiths. In practice unregistered religious organizations operate freely, and the Government's policy of not recognizing any new religious faiths has not restricted the activities of unregistered religious groups.

The Constitution requires the Government "to patronize and protect Buddhism and other religions." The State subsidizes the activities of the three largest religious communities (Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian). The Government allocated approximately $45.8 million (1.83 billion baht) during fiscal year 2004 to support religious groups. Included in this amount were 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.

For fiscal year 2004, the Government allocated $1.3 million (50.1 million baht) for Islam and $90,000 (3.6 million baht) to Christian, Brahman-Hindu and Sikh organizations, with the majority, $75,000 (3 million baht), going to Christian organizations to support social welfare projects. 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. The Government considers donations made to maintain Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian buildings to be tax-free income; contributions for these purposes also are tax-deductible for private donors.

Religious instruction is required in public schools at both the primary (grades 1 through 6) and secondary (grades 7 through 12) education levels. The Ministry of Education has formulated a new course called "Social, Religion, and Culture Studies," which students in each grade study for 1–2 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 reli-

gious 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 1–6, 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 types of private Islamic studies schools. One type, which teaches only Islamic religious courses, has more than 300 schools nationwide with approximately 30,000 students and 6,000 teachers. 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 type, which teaches Islamic religious courses concurrently with the traditional state education curriculum, has approximately 200 schools nationwide with more than 108,000 students and 4,450 teachers. 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. These are unregistered Islamic religious schools that have no government oversight or funding. The numbers of pondoks, students, and teachers are unknown; however, some sources believe that there are several hundred 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 August 2003 "National Religious Relations Day" event in Bangkok drew approximately 20,000 participants. 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), and a 1-week education program jointly organized by the National Identity Promotion Office and the National Council on Social Welfare. The latter event is held each December to celebrate the King's birthday. Representatives from every religious organization recognized by the RAD are invited to attend seminars associated with the event. The program also targets the general public through films and public displays. Additionally, in February the National Buddhism Bureau arranged a new annual 3-day interfaith meeting in Chiang Mai.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, government officials, at the request of Chinese government officials, reportedly have monitored Falun Gong members. According to Falun Gong representatives in the country, in October 2003, a 3-day convention was held without incident in Nakhon Ratchasima with approximately 300 Thai and foreign Falun Gong members. In late March, a Chinese mainland national Falun Gong member was arrested after he entered a Bangkok hotel to distribute Falun Gong documents to hotel guests. The individual was charged with trespassing, fined approximately $5 (200 baht), and released. The Falun Gong group in the country has submitted an application to register as an association with the Office of the National Cultural Commission and an application with the Police Department to print and distribute a weekly Falun Gong magazine. At the end of the period covered by this report, both requests were pending consideration by authorities. According to local media reports, police arrested three Chinese national Falun Gong followers who were distributing Falun Gong documents in Bangkok during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in October 2003.

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 2003, there were 1,800 registered foreign missionaries in the country. 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 during the period covered by this report. Many foreign missionaries entered

the country using tourist visas and proselytized or disseminated religious literature without the acknowledgment of the RAD. There were no reports that foreign missionaries were deported or harassed for working without registration, although the activities of Muslim professors and clerics were subjected disproportionately to scrutiny on national security grounds because of continued government concern about the resurgence of Muslim separatist activities in the south.

The Constitution provides for, and citizens generally enjoy, a large measure of freedom of speech. However, laws prohibiting speech likely to insult Buddhism remain in place.

National identity cards produced by the Ministry of Interior include an optional designation of the religious affiliation of the holder. Persons who fail or choose not to indicate religious affiliation in their applications can be issued cards without religious information.

Muslim female civil servants are not permitted to wear headscarves when dressed in civil servant uniforms. However, in practice most female civil servants are permitted by their superiors to wear headscarves if they wish, 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. Between January and the end of the period covered by this report, unknown assailants killed three Buddhist monks and attacked several Buddhist temples and one Chinese shrine. Unknown assailants beheaded a Buddhist civilian rubber tapper and left a note on his body warning that other Buddhists might share his fate. Consequently, a number of monks have reported that they are fearful and thus no longer able to travel freely through southern communities to receive alms. They also claim that laypersons sometimes decline to assist them in their daily activities out of fear of being targeted by militants.

Militants continued to assassinate minor government officials in the southern part of the country on almost a daily basis. Many government officials and law enforcement authorities presumed the slain Buddhist monks and laypersons who had no government affiliation and apparently were targeted solely because of their religious beliefs might have been the victims of separatist militants hoping 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 also offered to pay compensation to the families of 106 Islamic militants slain while attacking security forces on April 28 and allocated funds for the restoration of the Krue Se Mosque, which soldiers damaged during the fighting.

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.

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.

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 a total land area of approximately 277 square miles and its population is 101,405. According to the last official census (1996), membership by percentage of population of major denominations is: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 41 percent; Roman Catholic, 16 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 14 percent; Free Church of Tonga, 12 percent; others, 17 percent. However, both Roman Catholics and 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, Assembly of God, Anglicans, the Baha'i Faith, Islam, and Hinduism are represented in much smaller numbers. There is no resident Jewish community. There were no reports of atheists.

Western missionaries, particularly Mormons and other Christian denominations, are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion. Registration of religious groups is recommended by the Government for tax purposes, but 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 operate without special restrictions. There are a number of schools operated by Mormons and by the Wesleyan Church.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution states that Sunday, the Sabbath day, is to be "kept holy" and that no business can be conducted "except according to law." Although an exception is made for hotels and resorts that are part of the tourism industry, the Sabbath day business prohibition is enforced strictly for all businesses, regardless of the business owners' religion.

The Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) maintains policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines state that in view of "the character of the listening public," those who preach on Radio Tonga must confine their preaching "within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition." Due to this policy, the TBC does not allow members of the Baha'i Faith to discuss the tenets of their religion, or the founder, Baha'u'llah, by name. Similarly, the TBC does not allow Mormons to discuss their founder, Joseph Smith, or the Book of Mormon by name. This policy applies to all churches. Mormons 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 carries news articles about Baha'i activities or events, as well as about those of other faiths.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

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 a resident Embassy in the country; the U.S. Ambassador in Suva, Fiji, is 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 meet with religious officials and nongovernmental organizations during visits to the country.

TUVALU

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

There was no significant change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. However, in July 2003, the island council of Nanumanga reportedly banned the newly formed Tuvalu Brethren Church.

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. There are no official figures on religious membership; however, government officials estimate membership as follows: Church of Tuvalu, 91 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 3 percent; Baha'i, 3 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; and Catholic, 1 percent. There are also smaller numbers of Muslims, Baptists, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and atheists.

All nine island groups have traditional chiefs who are members of the Church of Tuvalu. Most followers of other religions or denominations are found in Funafuti, the capital, with the exception of the relatively large proportion of followers of the Baha'i Faith on Nanumea Island.

There are a number of active Christian missionary organizations representing some of the same religious faiths practiced in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion, and the Constitution provides for separation of church and state. However, in practice government functions at the national and island council levels, such as the opening of Parliament, often include Christian prayers, clergy, or perspectives. By law any new religious group with more than 50 members must register; failure to register could result in prosecution.

Missionaries practice without specific restrictions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, in July 2003, the island council of Nanumanga reportedly banned the newly formed Tuvalu Brethren Church. The head of the Tuvalu Brethren Church filed a complaint against the island council. In April the High Court scheduled the case to be heard in September.

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. According to unconfirmed reports, some residents of Nanumanga were stoned by islanders after leaving the Church of Tuvalu and forming the Tuvalu Brethren Church. Subsequently, the island council reportedly voted to ban the group.

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 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 also is accredited to the Government. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Fiji visit periodically to discuss religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials also meet with representatives of the religious communities and nongovernmental organizations that have an interest in religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy actively supports efforts to improve and expand governmental and societal awareness of and protection for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion.

VANUATU

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

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

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 approximately 4,707 square miles, and its population is approximately 183,000. The great majority of the population belongs to Christian churches, although many combine their Christian faith with some pre-Christian cultural practices. Church membership primarily is Presbyterian (approximately 48 percent), Roman Catholic (15 percent), and Anglican (12 percent). Another 30 percent are members of the Church of Christ, the Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God, or the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The John Frum Movement, a political party that also is an indigenous religious movement, is centered on the island of Tanna and includes less than 5 percent of the population. Muslims, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reportedly also are active. There are believed to be members of

other religions within the foreign community who are free to practice their religions, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies.

Missionaries representing several Western churches brought Christianity to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some foreign missionaries continue this work; however, the clergy of the established churches now primarily are indigenous. Missionaries represent the Church of Christ, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics. Missionary activity includes the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which translates the New Testament into indigenous languages.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The preamble of the Constitution refers to a commitment to traditional values and Christian principles; however, the Constitution also provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

In 1995, in response to concerns expressed by some established churches about the activities of new missionary groups, such as the Holiness Fellowship, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Parliament passed the Religious Bodies Act, which requires religious organizations to register with the Government. A few churches have registered voluntarily under the act. Some churches were concerned that the legislation would have a chilling effect on missionary activity. However, although Parliament has made no effort to repeal the act, it remains dormant; two of the new missionary groups most likely to be affected reported that the legislation did not inhibit their religious practices during the period covered by this report.

The Government interacts with churches through the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Vanuatu Christian Council. Customarily, government oaths of office are taken on the Bible. The Government provides some financial help for the construction of churches for Vanuatu Christian Council members, provides grants to church-operated schools, and pays teachers' salaries at church-operated schools that have been in existence since the country's independence in 1980. These benefits are not available to non-Christian religious organizations. Government schools also schedule time each week for religious education conducted by representatives of council churches, using materials designed by those churches. Students whose parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. Non-Christian 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 community ap-

proval, 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 government decrees provide for freedom of worship; however, the Government continued to restrict significantly those publicly organized activities of religious groups that were not recognized by the Government, or that it declared to be at variance with state laws and policies. Although some nonrecognized groups faced relatively few restrictions in practice, their status remained technically illegal. The Government generally allowed persons to practice individual worship in the religion of their choice, and participation in religious activities throughout the country continued to grow significantly; however, strict restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of religious groups remained in place. The Government maintained supervisory control of the recognized religions, in part because the Communist Party (CPV) fears that not only organized religion but any organized group outside its control or supervision may weaken its authority and influence by serving as political, social, and spiritual alternatives to the authority of the Government.

Respect for religious freedom remained fundamentally unchanged; while it slightly improved in practice for many practitioners, it remained poor or even deteriorated for some groups, notably ethnic minority Protestants and some independent Buddhists. In 2003, the CPV and Government moved more formally to recognize and support more fully the role of "legal" religious activity in society. At the same time, the CPV cited the overriding importance of "national unity" to assert more explicitly its control over religious groups. Official government recognition is required for all religious groups (as well as for social organizations) to operate legally; those without official status, especially certain sects and denominations of Buddhists, Protestants, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai, operated illegally. Oversight of recognized religions and harassment or repression of followers of nonrecognized religions varied from locality to locality, often as a result of varying local interpretations of national policy. These restrictions were particularly stringent in the Central and Northwest Highlands during the period covered by this report, although the numbers of religious believers in those locations nonetheless continued to grow. Religious groups faced restrictions on training and ordaining clergy, and on conducting educational and humanitarian activities. Religious figures encountered the greatest restrictions when they engaged in activities that the CPV perceived as political activism or a challenge to its rule. In December 2003, the Government issued a decree that called for the "normalization" of activities of the Southern Evangelical Church in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc Province, including the continued registration of new churches, but actual implementation at the local level remained unclear and the number of legal churches in the region remained very low. Most of the several hundred Protestant house churches in the region that had been ordered to shut down in 2001 remained officially closed and unrecognized. There have been credible reports for several years that officials have continued to pressure many ethnic minority Protestants to recant their faith, usually unsuccessfully. According to credible reports, the police arbitrarily detained and sometimes beat religious believers, particularly in the mountainous ethnic minority areas. During the period covered by this report, one Protestant leader in the Northwest Highlands reportedly was beaten to death for refusing to recant his faith. Another Protestant leader reportedly was beaten to death in 2002. The Government specifically denied these allegations.

On April 10, ethnic minority protests took place in the Central Highlands. Several foreign organizations alleged that the protests were largely sparked by lack of religious freedom. Many Protestant and Catholic leaders in the Central Highlands claimed the reasons were more complicated, but they acknowledged that restrictions on religion added to an already volatile situation caused by land disputes, local cor-

ruption, and historical discrimination in education and employment. Credible reports as well as government accusations pointed to mobilization of the demonstrations by overseas groups with political or separatist agendas. Religious practice and observance generally was less restricted in other parts of the country.

In October 2003, authorities detained many of the leaders of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) after they held an organizational meeting without government permission in Binh Dinh Province. Among the persons detained were several who had been freed from detention a few months earlier. Four of the UBCV's leading members subsequently were sentenced to "administrative detention" without trial, while others, including Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang and deputy leader Thich Quang Do, remained under conditions resembling house arrest at their pagodas without officially being charged or sentenced. However, they were able to receive some visitors and conduct some religious activities and training, as evidenced by several large celebrations in honor of the Buddha's birthday at some UBCV pagodas on June 1; however, they were restricted from leaving their pagodas. The estimated number of prisoners and detainees held for religious reasons was at least 45, with a minimum of 11 more held in conditions resembling house arrest.

The relationship among religions in society generally is amicable. In various parts of the country, there were modest levels of cooperation and dialogue between Catholics and Protestants, Catholics and Cao Dai, Buddhists and Hoa Hao, and Buddhists and Cao Dai. Religious figures from most major recognized religions participated in official bodies such as the Vietnam Fatherland Front and the National Assembly.

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) maintained an active and regular 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 Religious Freedom, raised concerns about the repression of Protestantism in the Central and Northwest Highlands, detention and arrest of religious figures, and other restrictions on religious freedom with government cabinet ministers up to the level of Deputy Prime Minister, CPV leaders, provincial officials, and others. Intervention by the U.S. Government may have prompted the Government to moderate treatment of some ethnic minority Protestants in some Central Highlands provinces, as well as to promote some liberalization of government treatment of other religions. 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.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 127,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 80 million. The Government officially recognizes one Buddhist organization (Buddhists make up approximately 50 percent of the population), the Roman Catholic Church (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.

Among the country's religious communities, Buddhism is the dominant religious belief. Many Buddhists practice an amalgam of Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucian traditions that sometimes is called the country's "triple religion." Some estimates suggest that more than half of the population is at least nominally Buddhist. Buddhists typically visit pagodas on festival days and have a worldview that is shaped in part by Buddhism, but in reality these beliefs often rely on a very expansive definition of the faith. Many individuals, especially among the ethnic majority Kinh, who may not consider themselves Buddhist, nonetheless follow traditional Confucian and Taoist practices and often visit Buddhist temples. One prominent Buddhist official has estimated that approximately 30 percent of Buddhists are devout and practice their faith regularly. The Office of Religious Affairs uses a much lower estimate of 11 percent (9 million) practicing Buddhists. Mahayana Buddhists, most of whom are part of the ethnic Kinh majority, are found throughout the country, especially in the populous areas of the northern and southern delta regions. There are fewer Buddhists, proportionately, in certain highland areas, although migration of Kinh to highland areas is changing the distribution somewhat. Mahayana Buddhist monks in the country historically have engaged on occasion in political and social issues, most notably during the 1960s, when some monks campaigned for peace and against perceived injustices in the former Republic of Vietnam. A Khmer

ethnic minority in the south practices Theravada Buddhism. Numbering just over 1 million persons, they live almost exclusively in the Mekong Delta.

There are an estimated 6 to 8 million Roman Catholics in the country, although official government statistics put the number at 5,300,000. French missionaries introduced the religion 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 HCMC 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. Long-vacant bishoprics have been filled by the Vatican, with government approval, in the past several years, and in 2003 a new Vietnamese cardinal was named by the Vatican, apparently with government agreement but not prior approval. However, the Government continues to control and restrict the numbers of seminarians and screen all candidates upon application and graduation.

Estimates of the number of Protestants in the country range from the official government figure of 421,000 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 Da Nang. There are estimates that the growth of Protestant believers has been as much as 600 percent over the past decade, despite continued government restrictions on proselytizing activities. Many of these persons belong to unregistered evangelical house churches primarily in rural villages and ethnic minority areas. Based on believers' estimates, two-thirds of Protestants are members of ethnic minorities, including Hmong, Thai, and other ethnic minorities (an estimated 200,000 followers) in the Northwest Highlands, and some 350,000 members of ethnic minority groups of the Central Highlands (Ede, Jarai, Bahnar, and Koho, among others). The house church movement in the Northwest was sparked in part by Hmong language radio broadcasts from the Philippines beginning in the late 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 2.2 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 HCMC 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 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 Office of Religious Affairs, there are 1.3 million Hoa Hao followers; affiliated expatriate groups estimate that there may be up to 3 million followers. Hoa Hao followers are concentrated in the Mekong Delta, particularly in provinces such as An Giang, where the Hoa Hao were dominant as a political and military as well as a religious force before 1975. Elements of the Hoa Hao were among the last to surrender to Communist forces in the Mekong Delta in the summer of 1975. The government-recognized Hoa Hao Administrative Committee was organized in 1999.

Mosques serving the country's small Muslim population, estimated at 65,000 persons, operate in western An Giang Province, HCMC, Hanoi, and provinces in the southern coastal part of the country. The Muslim community is composed mainly of ethnic Cham, although in HCMC 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 HCMC, with 2,000 residing in neighboring Dong Nai Province. Another 5,000 live in the south central coastal provinces of Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan. Approximately 50 percent of Muslims practice Bani Islam, a type of Islam unique to the ethnic Cham who live on the central coast of the country. Bani clerics fast during Ramadan; ordinary Bani followers do not. The Bani Koran is an abridged version of 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 HCMC; some are ethnic Cham but most are Indian or of mixed Indian-Vietnamese descent.

There are an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 members of the Baha'i Faith, largely concentrated in the south, a number of whom are foreign-born. Prior to 1975, there were an estimated 200,000 believers, according to Baha'i officials. Some Baha'i members in HCMC were allowed to hold a quiet ceremony to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Baha'i faith in the country on May 22.

There are several hundred members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) who are spread throughout the country but live primarily in HCMC and Hanoi. Some are pre-1975 converts, while others became Mormons while living in Cambodia.

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 HCMC.

Of the country's approximately 80 million citizens, 14 million or more reportedly do not practice any organized religion. Some sources strictly define those considered to be practicing Buddhists, excluding those whose activities are limited to visiting pagodas on ceremonial holidays. Using this definition, the number of nonreligious persons would be much higher, perhaps as high as 50 million. No statistics are available on the level of participation in formal religious services, but it generally is acknowledged that this number has continued to increase from the early 1990s.

Ethnic minorities constitute approximately 14 percent of the overall population. The minorities historically have practiced sets of traditional beliefs different from those of the ethnic majority Kinh. Except for the Khmer and the Cham, most minorities are more likely to be Protestant than the majority Kinh, although many ethnic minority Protestants continue to observe some traditional animist practices.

Several dozen foreign missionary groups throughout the country are engaged in developmental, humanitarian, educational, and relief efforts. These organizations legally are registered as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) providing humanitarian assistance. Foreign missionaries legally are not permitted to proselytize or perform religious activities. To work in the country, they must be registered with the Government as an international NGO. Undeclared missionaries from several countries are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, government decrees, and a January 2003 CPV Central Committee resolution on religion provide for freedom of belief and worship as well as of nonbelief; however, the Government continued to restrict significantly those organized activities of religious groups that it regarded to be at variance with state laws and policies or a challenge 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. In some localities, authorities also tacitly allowed many members of unregistered religious groups to practice their faith freely. Participation in religious activities throughout the country continued to grow significantly. However, the Government continued its close oversight and control over religious hierarchies, organized religious activities, and other activities of religious groups. While the Office on Religious Affairs supervises recognized religious bodies and is tasked with protecting their rights, in practice there are few effective legal remedies for violations of religious freedom committed by government officials.

The constitutional right of freedom of belief and religion is interpreted and enforced unevenly. In some areas, local officials allow relatively wide latitude to believers; in other provinces in the north, the Northwest Highlands, the Central Highlands, and the central coast, religious members of nonrecognized entities sometimes undergo significant harassment or repression and are subject to the whims and prejudices of local officials in their respective jurisdictions. This particularly was true for Protestants in highland areas, many of whose requests for affiliation with one of the two recognized Protestant organizations have not been approved by the Government.

There are no known cases in recent years in which the courts acted to interpret laws to protect a person's right to religious freedom. National security and national solidarity provisions in the Constitution override guarantees of 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 and 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." In their implementation of administrative probation, some local authorities held persons under conditions resembling house arrest. The authorities use administrative probation as a means of controlling persons whom they believe hold independent and potentially subversive opinions. Some local authorities cite "abuse of religious freedom" as a reason to impose administrative probation. Two-year administrative probation terms were placed on four UBCV leaders during the period covered by this report.

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 Constitution expressly protects the right of "nonbelief" as well as "belief."

The Government requires religious and other groups to register and uses this process to monitor and control religious organizations, as it does with all social organizations. The Government officially recognizes Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Muslim religious organizations. Individual congregations within each of these religious groups must be registered as well. Some leaders of Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai organizations and many believers of these religions do not recognize or participate in the government-approved associations. Some, especially Protestant denominations, have requested official recognition of their own independent organizations, so far unsuccessfully. Their activities, and those of the unregistered Protestant house churches, are considered illegal by the authorities, and members of these groups sometimes experience harassment or repression as a result. Other Protestant house churches are seeking affiliation with one of the two existing recognized organizations. Under the law, only those activities and organizations expressly sanctioned by the Government are deemed to be legal. To obtain official recognition, a group must obtain government approval of its leadership, its structure, and the overall scope of its activities. Recognized religious groups in principle are allowed to open, operate, and refurbish places of worship, train religious leaders, and obtain permission for the publication of materials.

Officially recognized religious organizations are able to operate openly in most parts of the country, and followers of these religions are able to worship without harassment. Officially recognized organizations must consult with the Government about their operations, including leadership selection, although not about their basic articles of faith. While the Government does not directly appoint the leadership of the official religious organizations, to varying degrees it plays an influential role in shaping the process of selection and must approve investitures of religious titles. The Government's influence varies by level of the title, religion, and local authority. For example, the power to approve a religious office holder below the provincial level lies with the provincial authorities. Higher-level officials receive much closer scrutiny. Decree 26 from 1999 explicitly gives the Government the power to approve

all holders of religious offices; the Government effectively, but not explicitly, has veto power. In general, religious bodies are confined to dealing specifically with spiritual and organizational matters and are restricted in the other activities, such as charitable programs, that they can conduct.

On June 18, the National Assembly's Standing Committee passed an Ordinance on Belief and Religion, which will take effect in November. The ordinance reiterates citizens' right to freedom of belief, religion, and freedom not to follow a religion, and it states that violation of these freedoms is prohibited. It advises, however, 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 also reiterates the principle of government control and oversight of religious organizations, specifying that religious groups must be recognized by the Government and must seek approval from authorities for many activities, including the training of clergy, construction of religious facilities, preaching outside a specifically recognized facility, and evangelizing. Many activities, including promotion and transfer of clergy and annual activities of religious groups, appear to be held under the new ordinance to the lower standard of "registration" with the Government, rather than approval. The ordinance encourages religious organizations to engage in certain charitable activities.

Over the past several years, the Government has accorded much greater latitude to followers of recognized religious organizations, and the majority of the country's religious followers have continued to benefit from this development. The Government and CPV have held conferences to discuss and publicize religious decrees that reaffirm the right to believe but reiterate the need for all religious activities to be "legal," thus mandating government oversight. Nonetheless, the Office of Religious Affairs and the CPV's Mass Mobilization Commission have met with house church leaders from HCMC and the Central Highlands, as well as with leaders of other unrecognized religious groups.

Religious organizations must register their regular activities with the authorities annually. Religious organizations must in theory obtain permission to hold training seminars, conventions, and celebrations outside the regular religious calendar; to build or remodel places of worship; to engage in charitable activities or operate religious schools; and to train, ordain, promote, or transfer clergy. They also must obtain permission for large mass gatherings, as do nonreligious groups. Many of these restrictive powers lie principally with provincial or municipal people's committees, and local treatment of religious persons varies widely.

The degree of government oversight of church 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 HCMC the Catholic Church is involved in running HIV/AIDS hospices and treatment centers, and providing counseling to young persons. Buddhist groups engaged in humanitarian activities, including counternarcotics programs, in many parts of the country. The Hoa Hao organization reported that it engaged in numerous charitable activities and local development projects. Foreign missionaries and religious organizations are not allowed to operate as such in the country. Some religiously affiliated international NGOs are registered with the Government to carry out humanitarian assistance. They may not engage in proselytizing. Catholic 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.

In 2001, the Government recognized the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV). The SECV has affiliated churches in all of the southern provinces of the country, but administrative boards in five provinces and HCMC remain not formally recognized. In February 2003, the SECV opened a government-sanctioned theological school in HCMC with 50 students. Since December 2003, 10 additional SECV congregations have been officially recognized in the Central Highlands.

The northern branch of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) has been recognized since 1963 and officially 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 parts of the country, although it has not formally applied for official recognition for any of these churches. The ECVN has not been allowed freely to hold a national convention since 1988. During much of the period covered by this report, the ECVN engaged in discussions with the Government about holding a new convention. Despite progress, these discussions ultimately stalled as a result of ongoing government restrictions.

Because of the lack of meaningful due process in the legal system, the actions of religious adherents are subject to the discretion of local officials in their respective

jurisdictions. There are no significant punishments for government officials who do not follow laws protecting religious practice, although a new law provides channels for citizens to seek payments for miscarriages of justice. There are no known recent cases in which the courts acted to interpret laws to protect a person's right to religious freedom.

There are no specific religious national holidays.

The Office of Religious Affairs occasionally hosts meetings for leaders of diverse religious traditions to address religious matters, and during the period covered by this report it had training sessions on religious freedom and "normal" practices for officials in the Central Highlands. The local branch in HCMC also has hosted training on religion for local officials over the past few years, with assistance from local clergy.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to maintain broad legal and policy restrictions on religious freedom, although in many areas Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and the Government itself reported an increase in religious activity and observance. Operational and organizational restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of recognized religious groups remained in place. Religious groups frequently faced difficulties in obtaining teaching materials, expanding training facilities, publishing religious materials, and expanding the number of clergy in religious training in response to increased demand from congregations, although enforcement of these types of restrictions appears to have been easing gradually for several years.

The Government continued to ban and actively discourage participation in what it regards as illegal religious groups, including the UBCV and Protestant house churches, as well as the unapproved Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. The withholding of official recognition of religious bodies is one of the means by which the Government actively attempts to restrict some types of religious activities. Religious and organizational activities by UBCV monks are illegal. Many evangelical house churches do not attempt to register because they believe that their applications would be denied, or because they want to avoid any semblance of government control. Some recognized religious groups carry out underground religious activities that they do not report to the Government and have faced little or no harassment. Some nonrecognized Protestant groups also conduct religious services and training 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 Religions 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. Khmer Theravada Buddhists are allowed a somewhat separate identity within VBS. The Government continued to oppose efforts by the unrecognized UBCV to operate independently. In early October 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—Thich Tue Sy, Thich Nguyen Ly, Thich Thanh Huyen, and Thich Dong Tho—were detained and sentenced without trial to 2 years' "administrative detention" in their respective pagodas. Many other leading members, including Thich Vien Dinh, Thich Thien Hanh, Thich Nguyen Vuong, and Thich Thai Hoa, have been placed under conditions similar to 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, house arrest-like restrictions, although the Government does not appear to be investigating its allegations of "possession of state secrets" against them. Previously, restrictions on Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do had been lessened in early 2003, such as when Thich Huyen Quang traveled to Hanoi for medical treatment in March 2003 and met Prime Minister Phan Van Khai as well as the U.S. Ambassador. Thich Quang Do had been released from official administrative detention in June 2003.

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, including in a few churches in Hanoi and HCMC that offer English-language masses for expatriates. The Catholic Church continued to face many restrictions on the training and ordination of priests, nuns, and bishops. The Government effectively maintains veto power over Vatican appointments of bishops; however, in practice it has sought to cooperate with the Church in nominations for appointment. At least

nine bishoprics have been filled by the Vatican, in coordination with the Government, over the past 5 years, along with the naming of one new cardinal. Government officials have stated publicly that they "view the Catholic Church as a positive force."

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 Government had approved a seventh seminary, but the provincial government where it was to be located blocked the seminary, allegedly on the grounds that the province had no office to oversee institutions of higher education. The Catholic Church is now attempting to establish the seminary in a different location. 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 every year in at least some of its seminaries.

The ECVN has not held an annual meeting or elected new leadership since 1988, in part because of the Government's ongoing efforts to influence ECVN leadership and its refusal to recognize some ECVN clergy. In the spring of 2004, both sides made steps towards holding a new congress, with a hope of convening the general congress in 2004. The ECVN operated a theological school from 1988 to 1993; informal training of religious and lay leaders continues. The ECVN has issued papers of affiliation to 800 mostly ethnic minority congregations since 2002, representing approximately 110,000 members located in the northern and northwestern highlands. However, the Government has not officially accepted these enrollments, and the congregations remain unrecognized.

In 2001, the Government ordered almost all unrecognized Protestant congregations and meeting points in the Central Highlands, reportedly numbering several hundred, to close. Provincial governments have now recognized and permitted 28 of these to reopen. In December 2003, the Committee on Religious Affairs in Hanoi issued a decree on the "normalization" of Protestantism in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc Province, ostensibly intended to expedite the registration of churches in the region, subject to government control and approval. The decree invited SECV congregations to register with local authorities and suggested the Church prepare study classes that could lead to the official recognition of house-church preachers. Ten of the 28 SECV congregations in the Central Highlands have been recognized since the issuance of the normalization decree. Some Protestant pastors in the Central Highlands remain suspicious of the SECV and reportedly do not plan to seek affiliation with it.

Many pastors of Protestant denominations such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, and Assemblies of God (AOG) still do not wish to join the SECV because of doctrinal differences. The Government has held discussions about recognition and registration with leaders of at least four Protestant denominations, including Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists. In the past, the Government had reportedly attempted to repress the AOG and other unregistered denominations by causing members to lose their jobs, forbidding their children to attend school, or confiscating their property, but it no longer imprisons AOG believers or pastors. In at least some—primarily urban—areas, government harassment of Pentecostals diminished during the period covered by this report; however, some Mennonites reportedly faced harassment by government officials in some parts of the country during this same period.

Despite the small increase in the number of legal SECV churches in the Central Highlands, provincial authorities continued to restrict Protestant activities in the region, particularly among ethnic minorities, such as the Mnong, Ede, Jarai, and Bahnar. Protestant Christmas and Easter celebrations in the Central Highlands were allowed in most localities but prohibited in others. There is substantial networking among Protestant denominations in HCMC but less in the rest of the country. Underground churches from pre-1975 denominations generally were reported to have fewer restrictions than those established more recently.

There are no officially recognized Protestant churches in the Northwest Highlands, despite the estimated presence of over 100,000 believers in the region. Officials from Ha Giang, Lai Chau, and Dien Bien have specifically told U.S. diplomats that there were no Protestants at all in their respective provinces, despite acknowledgement by central government officials in Hanoi that numerous house churches and Protestant believers are present in the Northwest Highlands.

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 contin-

ued 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. Several leaders of the Hoa Hao community, including several pre-1975 leaders, openly criticized the Council, claiming that it was subservient to the Government, and demanded official recognition instead of their own Hoa Hao body, the Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church (HHCBC). The Government turned down a group that subsequently tried to register the independent Hoa Hao organization. Some members of this group were incarcerated and remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report. The Government continued to restrict the number of clergy that the Hoa Hao can train. On June 8–9, the Hoa Hao Administrative Council held its second congress, attended by 500 representatives from around the country. At the conference, the council approved a new charter to replace the regulations under which the council formerly operated and elected a new 21-member Executive Board in place of the old 11-member Representative Board.

The Government never dissolved the Cao Dai Church but placed it under the control of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in 1977. The Government banned several of the Church's essential ceremonies because it considered them "superstitious," and it imprisoned and reportedly killed many Cao Dai clergy in the late 1970s. The Government began recognizing Cao Dai organizations in 1995. In 1997, a Cao Dai Management Council drew up a new constitution under government oversight. It confirmed the ban on certain traditional "superstitious" rituals, including the use of mediums to communicate with spirits. Because the use of mediums was essential to ceremonies accompanying promotion of clerics to higher ranks, the new Cao Dai constitution effectively banned clerical promotions. In December 1999, the Management Council reached agreement with Cao Dai clergy that the Cao Dai Church would modify its rituals in a way that would be acceptable to the Government but maintain enough spiritual direction to be acceptable to Cao Dai principles. As a result, a congress was held in which several hundred Cao Dai clergy were promoted for the first time since 1975. A second congress was held in 2002. The Cao Dai Management Council has the power to control all of the affairs of the Cao Dai faith and thereby manages the Church's operations, its hierarchy, and its clergy within the country. Independent Cao Dai officials oppose the edicts of this council as unfaithful to Cao Dai principles and traditions. Religious training takes place at individual Cao Dai temples rather than at centralized schools; Cao Dai officials have indicated that they do not wish to open a seminary.

The Muslim Association of Vietnam was banned in 1975 but reauthorized in 1992. It is the only registered Muslim organization in the country. Association leaders state they are able to practice their faith, including saying daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and teaching the Koran. At least 9 Muslims made the hajj during the period covered by this report, and at least 75 Muslim students from the country were studying abroad.

The Government restricts and monitors all forms of public assembly, including assembly for religious activities; however, on some occasions large religious gatherings have been allowed, such as the Catholic celebrations at La Vang, 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. Even house church Protestants have been able to gather in groups of as many as 5,000 for special worship services in HCMC and elsewhere. In March, the police in HCMC reportedly sent a circular to hotels noting an increase in the use of hotel function rooms for "illegal preaching" and other prohibited activities and reminded owners to exert proper oversight and alert the police to such meetings.

In 1999, the Government issued a decree on religion that prescribed the rights and responsibilities of religious believers. The religious decree states that persons formerly detained or imprisoned must obtain special permission from the authorities before they may resume religious activities. Religious activities are not allowed in prisons, nor are visits by religious workers.

The Government prohibits proselytizing by foreign missionary groups and discourages public proselytizing outside of recognized worship centers, even by Vietnamese citizens. Some missionaries visited the country despite this prohibition and carried on informal proselytizing activities. The Government has in the past deported some foreign persons for unauthorized proselytizing, sometimes defining proselytizing very broadly, although there were no known cases during the period covered by this report.

In Hanoi and HCMC, there were Sunday morning Catholic masses conducted in English by local Vietnamese priests for the convenience of foreigners and also well-publicized Protestant worship services for foreigners conducted by foreigners. An ex-

patriate worship service at a hotel in Da Nang was cancelled by management this year, reportedly at the request of the Government. There were regularly scheduled Muslim services for citizens and foreigners in both cities.

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 groups 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 has been known to restrict religious speech on various legal pretexts including "sowing division between believers and nonbelievers" and "damaging national unity."

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 prophesies; 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 Koran in 2000 to distribute one to each Muslim believer in the country. Unrecognized Protestant groups are often unable to obtain Bibles and other religious materials through legal channels. Bibles in ethnic minority languages are also in very short supply.

The Government allows religious travel for religious persons; Muslims are able to undertake the hajj, and Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant officials also have been able to travel abroad for study and for conferences. Some religious believers, such as UBCV monk Thich Thai Hoa, who do not belong to officially recognized religions occasionally have not been approved for foreign travel, but since early 2001 many ministers of underground Protestant churches have been able to travel frequently overseas. Like other citizens, religious persons who travel abroad sometimes are questioned about their activities upon their return and required to surrender their passports. However, this practice appears to be becoming more infrequent, and even many leaders of underground Protestant churches reported in 2002 and 2003 that they were not questioned. In January, Vietnamese house church pastors Tran Dinh Ai and Ho Hieu Ha, who had recently emigrated abroad, were refused re-entry to the country. Catholic bishops face no restrictions on international travel, including to Rome, and many nuns have also been able to go abroad for study and conferences. The Government also allowed many Catholic bishops and priests to travel freely within their dioceses and allowed greater, but sometimes restricted, freedom for domestic travel outside of these areas, particularly in many ethnic areas.

Religious affiliation is indicated on citizens' national identification cards and on "family books," which are household identification documents. In practice many citizens who consider themselves religious do not indicate this on their identification card, and government statistics list them as 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 by officially recognized religious bodies with coreligionists in other countries; however, the Government actively discourages contacts between the UBCV and its foreign Buddhist supporters. Contacts between Vatican authorities and Catholics in the country occur routinely, and the Government maintains a regular, active dialogue with the Vatican on a range of issues including organizational activities, the prospect of establishing diplomatic relations, and a possible papal visit. A senior Vatican official visited the country in April and was allowed to travel to dioceses in several locations. 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. A Dega group overseas, operating as Montagnard Foundation,

Inc., has set up a self-proclaimed government in exile and contacted some individuals in the country to advance its agenda. Estimates by one local Protestant leader of the percentage of Protestants actively affiliated with or sympathetic to the Dega in one particular Central Highlands Province run as high as 20 percent, while other estimates are much lower.

On April 10, protests by ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak and Gia Lai, and possibly Dak Nong, reportedly were violently suppressed by police and government authorities. Some of the protestors turned to violence as well, throwing stones and threatening police. Montagnard Foundation, Inc. representatives claimed that restrictions on religious freedom were a major cause of the protests. The Government, as well as many Catholic and both official and unofficial Protestant church leaders within the country, said the protests were largely unrelated to religious issues but were due primarily to land disputes, local corruption, traditional ethnic animosities, and perceived discrimination against ethnic minority groups by the majority Vietnamese Kinh.

Adherence to a religious faith generally does not disadvantage persons in civil, economic, and secular life, although it likely would prevent advancement to the highest 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 January 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. CPV and government officials routinely visited pagodas and temples and sometimes even attended Christian church services, making a special point to visit Protestant churches in the Central Highlands over Christmas.

The 1999 religious decree stipulates which local offices must approve renovations, modifications, and repairs of religious structures. It also requires groups to obtain the approval of provincial authorities before constructing religious structures. Local authorities reportedly have used these measures to justify the closure and demolition of small religious structures belonging to unregistered Protestant groups, particularly in Dak Lak and other Central Highlands provinces. The decree stated that no religious organization can reclaim lands or properties taken over by the State following the end of the 1954 war against French rule and the 1975 Communist victory in the south. Despite this blanket prohibition, the Government has returned some church properties confiscated since 1975. One of the vice-chairmen of the recognized VBS stated that approximately 30 percent of Buddhist properties confiscated in HCMC have been returned since 1975, and from 5 to 10 percent of all Buddhist properties confiscated in the south have been returned. However, the former Protestant seminary in Nha Trang is used for secular purposes, as is a former Protestant seminary in Hanoi. The Catholic and recognized Protestant organizations have obtained a number of previously confiscated properties but still have ongoing disputes—often with local and provincial officials—over former church properties. Most Cao Dai and Hoa Hao properties also have not been returned, according to church leaders. The recognized Hoa Hao Administrative Council has acknowledged that the Government returned 12 previously confiscated Hoa Hao pagodas in Dong Thap Province in 2001 and 2002.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; however, it 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 HCMC universities. They are not allowed to wear religious dress when they teach or to identify themselves as clergy. Catholic religious education, on weekends or evenings, is permitted in most areas and has increased in recent years in churches throughout the country. Khmer Theravada Buddhists and Cham Muslims regularly hold religious and language classes outside of normal classroom hours in their respective pagodas and mosques.

Local Protestant sources alleged that authorities in many localities in Dak Lak prohibited Protestant children from attending school past the third grade. There have been unconfirmed allegations that Christians are excluded from special ethnic minority boarding schools. Discrimination of this sort has been denied by local authorities and some church leaders, but such reports persist. General discrimination against ethnic minorities has long been a problem in the region.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

A significant number of religious believers experience harassment or repression because they operate without legal sanction. Local officials have repressed unregis-

tered Protestant believers in the Central and Northwest Highlands and other areas by forcing church gatherings to cease, demolishing or closing house churches, and pressuring them to renounce their religious beliefs, often unsuccessfully. Restrictions on UBCV leaders intensified during the period covered by this report, with much of the group's leadership placed under official or de facto pagoda arrest. Police authorities often questioned persons who hold independent religious or political views. There were credible reports that officials arbitrarily detained, beat, and harassed some persons based, at least in part, on their religious beliefs and practice, particularly in mountainous ethnic minority areas.

The penal code establishes penalties for offenses that are defined only vaguely, including "attempting to undermine national unity" by promoting "division between religious believers and nonbelievers." In some cases, particularly involving Hmong Protestants, authorities have used provisions of the penal code that allow for jail terms of up to 3 years without trial for "abusing freedom of speech, press, or religion." There have been ongoing complaints that officials fabricated evidence, and that some of the provisions of the law used to convict religious prisoners contradict the right to freedom of religion.

A 1997 directive on administrative probation gives national and local security officials broad powers to detain and monitor citizens and control where they live and work for up to 2 years if they are believed to be threatening "national security." In their implementation of administrative probation, some local authorities held persons under conditions resembling house arrest. The authorities use administrative probation as a means of controlling persons whom they believe hold independent opinions. Some local authorities cite "abuse of religious freedom" as a reason to impose administrative probation.

On numerous occasions throughout the country, small groups of Protestants belonging to house churches were subjected to harassment or arbitrary detention after local officials broke up unsanctioned religious meetings. There were many reported instances, particularly in remote provinces, in which Protestant house church followers were detained, beaten, or fined by local officials for participation in peaceful religious activities such as worship and Bible study.

On June 8, authorities in HCMC detained activist Mennonite house church pastor Nguyen Hong Quang for "inciting others to interfere with public security officers in furtherance of their duties." At the end of the period covered by this report, Quang had not been released or formally charged with any crime, as authorities carried out their investigation. Quang's detention is directly related to a March 4 incident in which several of his followers confronted persons they believed to be public security officers surveilling the pastor's home and seized an officer's motorbike. Those same followers then scuffled with other public security officers who arrived at the scene to retrieve the motorbike and investigate the incident. Four of Pastor Quang's followers were detained at the time, and another was detained afterwards in connection with Pastor Quang's arrest.

In December 2003, police in Hanoi and HCMC detained 16 members of an unregistered Protestant group affiliated with Pastor Quang for handing out Christian pamphlets disguised as official programs for the South East Asian Games. On March 25, Hanoi police detained 11 Hmong and 2 Kinh Protestants as they watched the film "The Passion of the Christ" in a private residence in Hanoi. In both cases, the detainees were released within 24 hours.

Authorities in the Central and Northwest Highlands reportedly restricted the religious freedom of members of evangelical Protestant house churches, especially among minority ethnic groups. Several leaders of these nonrecognized churches, especially among the Hmong in the northwest and among ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands, reportedly were harassed or detained, and sometimes pressured to renounce their faith, usually without success. House churches are frequently tolerated or ignored in some places, although their unofficial status often leaves them at the mercy of local authorities.

There are unconfirmed reports that officials in Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Ha Giang, and other provinces in the north and northwest attempted to force Hmong and other ethnic minority Christians to recant their faith, often without success. There are also unconfirmed reports that in Hoang Su Phi district of Ha Giang Province at least three Protestant house church leaders were sentenced to prison terms for leading "gatherings that caused public disorder" after organizing unauthorized religious services. Officials in Bac Ha district of Lao Cai Province reportedly detained four Protestant house church leaders and pressured other Protestants to sign documents renouncing their faith. In Muong Te District of Lai Chau Province, two girls reportedly were raped by government officials or militia to punish their families for adhering to Protestantism. Also in Muong Te district of Lai Chau Province, local authorities reportedly damaged or destroyed two houses used for nonrecognized Protestant

services. U.S. diplomats requested that the Government provide further information about these and other alleged abuses but received no response.

Hmong Protestant Vang Seo Giao of Ha Giang Province died in July 2003, reportedly after being beaten by authorities at the office of the People's Committee in Che La commune. A CPV member since 1990 who had recently converted to Christianity, Giao reportedly was beaten for refusing to renounce his faith and build an ancestral altar, and also for refusing to drink alcohol. Giao's family and friends appealed to the Government and to the ECVN-North to investigate his death. In response to inquiries by U.S. diplomats, Ha Giang provincial officials stated that Giao died in a flood. Senior government officials in Hanoi also claimed that Giao drowned attempting to cross a river while drunk.

Hmong Protestant believer Mua Say So of Dien Bien district, Dien Bien Province, reportedly was detained in April 2003 and accused of involvement in the death of his brother, Protestant believer Mua Bua Senh. Mua Bua Senh had died in 2002, reportedly after being beaten by authorities for refusing to renounce his faith. In October 2003, the Government informed U.S. diplomats that Mua Bua Senh had died of natural causes, but by the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not responded to Embassy inquiries about Mua Say So's current status or the reason for his continued detention.

There were reports that local authorities used a noxious gas to break up a Hmong Protestant worship service in Lai Chau Province in December 2002. Provincial authorities initially acknowledged an incident without giving details but later denied the reports entirely.

According to reports from the Central and Northwest Highlands, some local officials extorted goods, livestock, and money from Protestant believers. There were reports from the same regions of local officials driving ethnic minority persons out of their home villages for refusing to renounce their Protestant faith. The extent to which religious affiliation or other factors such as ethnicity or political activism caused these reported abuses could not be determined, although many reports stated that authorities cited religion as the reason for their actions.

Despite restrictions the number of Protestants continued to grow. 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 southern Gia Lai and northwestern Dak Lak provinces. The Dega have links to a group residing in the U.S., Montagnard Foundation, Inc., that has proclaimed itself a Dega "government-in-exile." While many Dega followers are Protestant, the relationship between the Degas and Protestant believers belonging to the recognized SECV or apolitical house church groups is tense. The Degas reportedly have made threats against certain mainstream Protestant pastors, many of whom accuse the Degas of using 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.

On April 10, several thousand ethnic minority citizens protested against authorities in several districts in the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak and Gia Lai (and possibly Dak Rong). 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 entirely political in nature. However, a government official indicated that, in the wake of the protests, the Government would delay further registration of churches and normalization of religious activities in the region. The Government blocked access to the Central Highlands by most foreign observers for 2 weeks after the April protests. When it again began to allow access for foreign diplomats, journalists, and others, strict control by officials, police, and plainclothes security agents made obtaining genuinely free and independent assessments of the situation in the area extremely difficult.

Outflows of ethnic minority highlanders—usually called "Montagnards"—seeking refugee status in Cambodia on religious grounds continued during the period covered by this report and increased slightly after the April 10 protests. Apparently at the request of the Government, many of the Montagnards who fled to Cambodia during this period were repatriated by Cambodian authorities with no consideration given to their allegations of abuse in Vietnam or requests for refugee status. In December 2002 and March 2003, at least 13 ethnic minority individuals were sentenced to prison terms related to unrest that took place in 2001. Government officials insist that these sentences were not related to any religious activities, although

often the alleged adherence of the detainees to the Dega movement complicated the issue.

Protestants also reported that authorities in Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, and some nearby provinces detained, beat, and harassed numerous Protestant believers, often in conjunction with pressure to renounce their faith. In March, officials in Sa Thay district, Kon Tum Province, reportedly beat several ethnic Ja Rai Protestant leaders while pressuring them to renounce their faith and cease their religious activities. Also in March, a Protestant lay leader in Kon Tum was reportedly fined by police, had Bibles and religious banners confiscated, and was threatened with imprisonment after holding unlicensed religious gatherings. In 2002, officials reportedly cut off electricity to the homes of ethnic Ede villagers in Ea Trol village in coastal Phu Yen Province after they refused to give up Christianity.

A purported Party document dated October 22, 2002, from Cu Mgar district in Dak Lak described Dega Christianity as a reactionary plot rather than a true religion and stated that investigation of the Dega Christian organization discovered 150 members as well as the presence of 440 illegal Protestant congregations in Dak Lak. In October 2002, the SECV complained that authorities had forced approximately 400 unofficial Protestant congregations in Dak Lak to disband. The Catholic Episcopal Council sent a letter of complaint, apparently largely about the difficulties Protestants were experiencing in the Central Highlands, to the Government and National Assembly in late 2002.

A May 2003 report by a foreign NGO alleged a program by local authorities, with the stated intention to "eradicate Christianity," to force Protestants in Dak Song Commune in then-Dak Lak Province (now in Dak Nong Province) to stop holding church gatherings of more than five persons.

The Government continued to isolate certain religious figures by restricting their movements and by pressuring supporters and family members. In October 2003, the UBCV held an unauthorized conference in Binh Dinh Province, reportedly to revitalize the organization and make appointments to leadership positions. Subsequent to the conference, authorities detained many leaders of the group and returned them to their respective pagodas. Four leaders of the UBCV—Thich Tue Sy, Thich Nguyen Ly, Thich Thanh Huyen, and Thich Dong Tho—were subsequently sentenced without trial to 2 years of administrative detention, which is similar to house arrest. Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang and deputy leader Thich Quang Do were briefly investigated for "possession of state secrets" after the October meeting and placed under conditions resembling house arrest in their respective pagodas. Authorities have not allowed them to leave their pagodas and have regularly cut off their telephone connections and prohibited most visitors from meeting them. Many other leaders of the UBCV, including Thich Thien Hanh, Thich Thai Hoa, Thich Nguyen Vuong, Thich Vien Dinh, and Thich Phuoc An, were also placed under conditions resembling house arrest at their pagodas after the October meeting, despite the absence of any charges against them.

Hoa Hao believers stated that a number of the leaders of the unofficial Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church (HHCBC) remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report. Those in detention include Ha Hai, the third-ranking officer of the HHCBC who had been sentenced to 5 years in prison in 2001 for abusing "democratic rights," as well as Hoa Hao believer Truong van Duc, who had been involved in an incident in 2000 in which 60 to 70 individuals attacked a group of Hoa Hao headed by church leader Le Quang Liem. Hoa Hao follower Nguyen Van Lia reportedly was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment in October 2003, after holding a commemoration of the disappearance of the Hoa Hao prophet. U.S. diplomats requested that the Government provide information about these and other Hoa Hao believers currently incarcerated but had received no response by the end of the period covered by this report.

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 HCMC in 1954. In 1988 police surrounded the 15-acre site and arrested all the priests and lay persons inside the compound. All but two of those detained—Father Pham Minh Tri and layperson Nguyen Thien Phung—subsequently were released. Father Tri reportedly was in poor health. Father Tri and Phung remained imprisoned at Xuan Loc camp, Dong Nai Province, despite some indications in December from senior government officials that they would be released. Both were originally given 20-year sentences, although Father Tri's was later reduced by 27 months, and by 3 more months in an April general amnesty.

Cao Dai believer Ngo Van Thong was arrested in 1977 and sentenced to death by a Tay Ninh provincial court; his sentence was later commuted to life imprison-

ment. He is believed to be in prison near Hanoi, but the Government has not responded to inquiries by U.S. diplomats about his condition.

In February 2001 at Tu Hieu Pagoda, on the day before the start of the "week of prayer," Catholic Father Nguyen Van Ly, Hoa Hao elder Le Quang Liem, and Buddhists monks Thich Thien Hanh and Thich Chan Tri met for the purpose of forming an interreligious body independent of government authority. Later in the same month, police surrounded Father Ly's church and placed him under administrative probation. His detention was reported widely in the state-controlled press, which identified him as a "traitor" for submitting written testimony critical of the Government to a U.S. human rights commission. In May 2001, allegedly as many as 300 police surrounded his church and arrested him. In October 2001, the Thua Thien-Hue Provincial People's Court convicted Father Ly and sentenced him to a total of 15 years in prison—2 years for disobeying the administrative probation order and 13 years for "damaging the Government's unity policy." The court also ordered 5 years of administrative detention, which is to confine him to his place of residence after his release. Father Ly had called not only for religious freedom but also for an end to one-party rule. In July 2003, the Ha Nam provincial court reduced Father Ly's sentence by 5 years in recognition of good behavior, and in June his sentence was further reduced by another 5 years. In January, U.S. visitors were allowed to meet with Father Ly and provide him letters and medicine.

It was impossible to determine the exact number of religious detainees and religious prisoners. There is little transparency in the justice system, and it is very difficult to obtain confirmation of when persons are detained, imprisoned, tried, or released. Moreover, persons sometimes are detained for questioning and subsequently held under conditions amounting to house arrest using administrative probation regulations without being charged or without their detention being publicized. By the end of the period covered by this report, there reportedly were at least nine religious detainees thought to be held without formal arrest or charge; however, the number may be much greater. Unconfirmed reports suggest there may be over 100 other Protestants detained in the Central Highlands, although the reasons for their incarceration may not be entirely related to their religious faith. Among those believed to be detained without having gone to trial are Hmong Protestant Mua Say So in Dien Bien; Hmong Protestants Vang Chin Sang, Ly Sin Quang, and Ly Giang Sung in Ha Giang Province; and Dinh Troi, an ethnic Hre Protestant detained in Quang Ngai in 1999. 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.

There were an estimated 44 religious prisoners and detainees, although the actual number may be much higher. This figure is difficult to verify because of the secrecy surrounding the arrest, detention, and release process. At least 11 other individuals were held in conditions resembling house arrest for reasons related to the expression of their religious beliefs or attempts to form nonauthorized 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: UBCV monk Thich Thien Minh; Catholic priests Pham Minh Tri and Nguyen Van Ly, and Catholic lay person Nguyen Thien Phung; Protestant believers Mua A Chau, Vang Chin Sang, Vang Mi Ly, Ly Xin Quang, and Ly Chin Seng; Cao Dai believer Ngo Van Thong; and Hoa Hao lay persons Nguyen Van Lia, Ha Hai, and Truong Van Duc. UBCV monks Thich Tue Sy, Thich Nguyen Ly, Thich Thanh Huyen, and Thich Dong Tho were given 2-year sentences of administrative detention in 2003. Other religious leaders, including UBC monks Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do and Catholic priest Pham Van Loi, were under de facto house arrest. Hoa Hao leaders Nguyen Van Dien and Le Quan Liem remained under formal administrative detention.

There were numerous reports that groups of vigilantes or "gangs of hoodlums" beat Protestant believers in the Central Highlands. In 2002, allegedly at the instigation of commune and district authorities, a "gang" in the predominantly Catholic village of Dak Chach, Dak La commune, Kon Tum Province, reportedly beat Protestant believers Du Van Anh and Y Thet (husband and wife) and pastor Dinh Van Truc for not renouncing their faith. Forced to flee the village soon afterwards, Anh and Y Thet sought refuge in neighboring villages during 2002 and into early 2003, reportedly being expelled by village authorities each time. In 2002, a "gang" in Buon Eu Sup village, Dak Lak Province, reportedly beat Protestant believer Siu Kret. His father complained to local police about the incident. The police fined the gang members $33 (VND 500,000) and a pig, but the victim's father reportedly had to swear to police he was not a Protestant believer to collect the compensation.

Forced Religious Conversion

On multiple occasions, local officials in several northwestern villages reportedly attempted to convince or force Hmong Protestants to recant their faith and sometimes also to perform traditional Hmong religious rites such as drinking blood from sacrificed chickens mixed with rice wine. Local authorities reportedly also encouraged clan elders to pressure members of their extended families to cease practicing Christianity and to return to traditional practices.

Following ethnic unrest in the Central Highlands in 2001, there also were numerous reports of local authorities attempting to force ethnic minority Protestants to renounce their faith. In the villages of Druh, B'Le, B'Gha, V'Sek, Koyua, Tung Thang, Tung Kinh, and Dung in Ea H'Leo district of Dak Lak Province, ethnic minority commune and district officials, some of whom are ethnic minorities themselves, were assigned to coerce Protestant followers symbolically to abandon Protestantism by drinking alcohol mixed with animal blood in a ritual called "the ceremony of repentance." In the villages of Buon Sup, Buon Ea Rok, and Buon Koya in Ea Sup district, Dak Lak Province, ethnic minority Protestants were pressured to undergo a similar ritual recantation of faith. There were some reports of this occurring in other instances during the period covered by this report.

In other provinces, authorities encouraged "revival of traditional culture," which includes abandoning Christian beliefs. According to what appears to be an official document from Khanh Hoa Province, in 2002 police convinced numerous households to abandon Protestantism and in some cases provided a cash reward as part of efforts to stamp out "illegal" religious activities.

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

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 overall remained fundamentally unchanged during the period covered by this report. It improved slightly in some areas, but remained poor or even deteriorated in parts of the Central Highlands and Northwest Highlands. In January 2003, a CPV Central Committee resolution on religion passed acknowledged the legitimate role of religious groups in social and charitable activities; however, it also reinforced that the CPV should control religious groups, that their activities should take place within legally defined bounds, and that illegal religious activity would be suppressed.

After the issuance of the decree on the "Operation of Protestantism in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc Province" by the Office of Religious Affairs in December 2003, 10 new churches were officially recognized in the Central Highlands, and preparations began to establish a local bible school for training classes that may lead to the recognition of many preachers working in unofficial status. In February 2003, the SECV opened an official theological school with 50 students and informed the Government that it was training more students outside the school.

Some leaders of nonrecognized Protestant churches reported that they continued negotiating with the Government for recognition, although no new recognitions were granted. Some pastors also reported that police surveillance of their worship activities has declined or ended, in some cases as long ago as early 2001. Some also reported that they have been able to conduct training activities openly. Many leaders of Protestant house churches have been allowed to travel overseas on multiple occasions.

Catholic leaders reported they were able to assign priests more easily than in the past, even in some remote areas where no priests had been assigned for decades. Attendance at religious services continued to increase during the period covered by this report. The number of Buddhist monks and Catholic priests also continued to increase. Local authorities in many parts of the country allowed religious organizations to engage in more charitable and social activities in line with the Party's new resolution. Many Catholic priests and nuns and Buddhist monks continued to operate orphanages, vocational centers, and health clinics with the knowledge of the Government. In addition there was continued gradual expansion of the parameters for individual believers adhering to one of the officially recognized religious bodies to practice their faiths.

Several thousand prisoners benefited from early releases through general amnesties during the period covered by this report, but it is unknown whether any of them were imprisoned for reasons related to expression of their religious faith.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In general there are amicable relations among the various religious communities, and there were no known instances of societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the period covered by this report. In HCMC there were some informal ecumenical dialogues among leaders of disparate religious communities. Buddhists, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai reportedly sometimes cooperate on some social and charitable projects. Working-level cooperation between the Catholic and Protestant churches occurs in many parts of the country. Various elements of the UBCV Buddhists, Catholics, Cao Dai, Protestant, and Hoa Hao communities appeared to network with each other; many of them reportedly formed bonds while serving prison terms at Xuan Loc.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. Consulate General in HCMC actively and regularly raised U.S. concerns about religious freedom with a wide variety of 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, HCMC, and the provinces. During a visit to the country in October 2003, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom advocated for greater religious freedom and enquired about reported abuses with the Deputy Prime Minister, Deputy Foreign Minister, Deputy Minister of Public Security, the head of the Office of Religious Affairs, the Chairman of the Fatherland Front, and other government officials. He also met with leaders of various recognized and nonrecognized religious groups. During the visit, he provided a list of alleged religious prisoners and requested information about why they were being held. The Government provided a partial response to this list. He also requested that the Government investigate reports of the killing of believers, including Mua Bua Senh and Vang Seo Giao, and allegations of rape, harassment, and arbitrary detentions of religious believers. He also asked the Government to investigate claims of forced renunciations and issue a clear prohibition.

The U.S. Ambassador, the Deputy Chief of Mission, the Consul General in HCMC, 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 and CPV 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 HCMC, 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 officers repeatedly informed government and CPV officials that the lack of progress on religious problems and human rights are a significant impediment to the full normalization of bilateral relations. The Embassy also distributed information about the U.S. concerns regarding religious freedom to government officials.

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 also urged greater freedom for recognized religious groups. Embassy and Consulate General officials also focused on specific abuses and restrictions on religious freedom. The Ambassador and other Mission officers repeatedly advocated ending restrictions on Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do, among others, and freeing Father Nguyen Van Ly. The Ambassador also requested that the Government investigate a number of cases of alleged abuses of religious believers and punish any officials found to be responsible. They, along with the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific and the Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom, urged a clear ban on attempts at forced renunciation and called for the re-opening of house churches that had been closed.

The April 2001 recognition of the SECV followed direct advocacy by U.S. officials during human rights dialogues and ongoing discussions involving the Ambassador, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and other U.S. officials. The State Department declined to hold a human rights dialogue with the Government in 2003 as a sign of displeasure over limited progress on issues discussed in previous dialogues.

Representatives of the Embassy and the Consulate General met on numerous occasions with leaders of all the major religious communities, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Muslims, Hindus, and Baha'is. In March, a Consulate General officer met with the recognized Hoa Hao Administrative Coun-

cil in An Giang Province and maintained regular contact with Hoa Hao dissidents and Hoa Hao elder Tran Huu Duyen. Mission officers met senior Cao Dai clergy affiliated with the pre-1975 Cao Dai leadership in Hanoi on different occasions. In April, the Ambassador met with Thich Huyen Quang while he was under conditions resembling house arrest at his pagoda, and during the period from June to October 2003 the Consul General met with UBCV monk Thich Quang Do when he was not under restrictions. Consulate General officers maintained regular contact with other UBCV Buddhist monks. Embassy and Consulate General officers met with the Cardinal of HCMC, the Catholic Archbishop of Hue, and the bishops of Hung Hoa, Nam Dinh, Ninh Binh, Kontum, Lang Son, Buon Ma Thuot, Dalat, and Haiphong as well as other members of the Episcopal Conference. The Ambassador and other Mission officers met with outspoken priest Chan Tin on several occasions during the period covered by this report. 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 HCMC, Embassy and Consulate General officers regularly meet with provincial Religious Affairs Committees, village elders, local clergy, and believers.

The U.S. Government commented publicly on the status of religious freedom in the country on several occasions. The Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs discussed concerns about religious freedom during the annual bilateral political dialogue held in Hanoi in May. The Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom, during his October 2003 visit to the country, warned that failure by the Government to improve conditions might lead to designation of Vietnam as a "Country of Particular Concern" and suggested improvements the Government might take to avoid this designation. Senior U.S. officials repeated this warning on several occasions during the year.

U.S. Government pressure may have had an immediate impact in some cases. After Consulate General officials highlighted the case of an unofficial Protestant church threatened with demolition in HCMC, authorities backed off their threats and eventually allowed the church to continue operations. After continued pressure through diplomatic channels, the Government allowed the U.S. Ambassador access to Thich Huyen Quang, and also permitted access of a U.S. Senator to imprisoned priest Nguyen Van Ly. The December 2003 decree laying out steps for increased activity by the SECV in the Central Highlands followed shortly after the visit of the Ambassador at Large for international Religious Freedom. In broader terms, some religious sources have cited diplomatic intervention, primarily from the U.S., as a reason why the Government is seeking to legalize more religious groups and is allowing already legalized groups more freedom. 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.

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 a total area of 11,100 square miles, and its population is approximately 3,069,275. 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 southern part of the country. Other small minorities include the Roma, Egyptian community (an ethnic group similar to the Roma which does not speak the Roma language), Vlachs, Chams, 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). In 1925 after the revolution of Ataturk, 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, or 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 whose application for citizenship has been pending for several years.

Muslims are spread throughout the country but are concentrated mostly in the middle of the country and to a lesser extent in the south. Orthodox remain mainly in the south, and 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 to the Orthodox Church. No data is available on active participation in formal religious services, but estimates are 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 about 17 different Muslim societies and groups active in the country; some of these groups were foreign. There were 31 Christian societies representing more than 45 different organizations and 500 to 600 Christian and Baha'i

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 holydays 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 Associations, 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. However, during 2003, the Government exempted foreign religious missionaries from the residence permit tax.

The State Committee on Cults, created by executive decision and based on the Constitution, 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 works 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. In the past, however, some foreign religious organizations have claimed that the Committee's involvement has not facilitated access to residence permits. No organization made such a claim during the period covered by this report.

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. No agreements exist at this time. The State Committee on Cults is considering the drafting of a law that would address all religious communities holistically; however, no action had been taken on this by the end of the period covered by this report. In 2002, the Committee coordinated the drafting of a model bilateral agreement for use in future negotiations with each religious community. Further progress in this direction has been placed on hold while the Committee considers the above-mentioned Law on Religion.

According to official figures, there are 14 religious schools in the country, with approximately 2,600 total students. The Ministry of Education has the right to approve the curricula of religious schools to ensure their compliance with national education standards, and the State Committee on Cults oversees implementation. There are also 68 vocational training centers administered by religious communities.

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. While there is no law restricting the demonstration of religious affiliation in public schools, there have been instances when students were not allowed to do so in practice. In December 2003, a male Muslim student was prohibited from having his diploma photograph taken because he had a beard. The student was eventually permitted to graduate through the intervention of the Office of the People's Advocate (a government institution tasked with investigating citizens' charges of human rights violations and protecting their fundamental freedoms). 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 yet 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 due to 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 on a cathedral is under way, the Orthodox Church has claimed delays in approvals for construction of churches and other buildings associated with the Church by the city government, and 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. The new Urban Regulatory Plan for Tirana sets aside land for a new mosque on this land. The Bektashi Community is also seeking compensation from the Government for victims of religious prosecution during the Communist regime.

In May, Parliament approved a property restitution law that includes provisions addressing religious properties, which may improve the overall situation for all religious communities. According to the new law, religious communities should have the same rights as private individuals in matters of property restitution or compensation. By the end of the period covered by this report, the law (controversial for unrelated reasons) had been rejected by the President, who returned it to Parliament for further revision.

The Albanian Evangelical Alliance, an association of approximately 97 Protestant churches throughout the country, claimed that it encountered administrative obstacles to 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 affiliations. The growing evangelical community has expanded its relationship with the country's various public institutions such as the universities.

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 prevails among them.

After the General Secretary of the Islamic Community of Albania, Sali Tivari, was shot and killed at the Community's headquarters in January 2003, the General Prosecutor's Office returned the case to the authorities for further investigation. The case remained unsolved by the end of the period covered by this report.

In October 2003, police arrested Kastriot Myftari, author of the book "Albanian National Islamism" on charges of inciting religious hatred. The book contained the author's opinions on Islam and how the religion has impacted Albanian life. According to the prosecutor's office, several statements in the book demeaned Islam. The prosecutor had asked the court for 6 months imprisonment for the author. In June, the court acquitted Myftari of all charges.

In 2002, some Bektashi communities outside of Tirana experienced intimidation, vandalism, and threats of violence. Subsequently, the Albanian authorities discovered those responsible (non-Albanian citizens) and expelled them for immigration violations. There were no new reports of vandalism during the period covered by this report.

Bektashi leaders believe that foreign religious influences seeking to undermine the country's efforts to maintain religious tolerance and freedom were at the root of these incidents. Other religious leaders have expressed similar concerns about the potentially divisive role played by non-citizen religious extremists.

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 foster the development of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the country, and 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.

Traditionally tolerant in religious affairs, the society is nonetheless subject to a range of external influences. Projects that support inter-faith understanding and that strengthen civic education in religious school help ensure that that tradition is preserved as forms of Islam and Christianity, new to the country, seek to take root. The Embassy has been active in urging tolerance and moderation as a continued hallmark of society. The Embassy's Public Affairs Office 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.

One project, the Civic and Faith-based Education Project, initiated throughout the country a series of roundtable discussions among educators, media representatives, and national and local government leaders to explore ways in which civic education is a community endeavor that extends beyond classroom walls. Working with the Medressa in Tirana, the leading Islamic school in the country, the Project developed the "School Gym Project." Students in this program learned about the application of civic principles as they visited municipal offices and utility companies to learn about licensing and other procedures associated with construction permits, water and sewer connections, and other requirements associated with the school's gymnasium expansion. Another highlight of the project was a joint effort carried out by students of the Medressa and one of the leading public high schools in Tirana. Medressa students visited the high school to participate with their public-school counterparts in presentations about religious communities' respective holydays. Muslim youth researched and presented Christian holydays, while Christian youth explained the significance of Islamic celebrations.

The Embassy's Public Affairs Office also supported a series of roundtable discussions on religious tolerance in local communities. The implementing nongovernmental organization brought together local government representatives, religious leaders, and other members of the community in smaller cities throughout the country for frank discussions of inter-faith relations, areas for concern, and ways to strengthen collaboration to promote general well-being in society. In May the same organization, similarly supported by the Embassy, embarked on a follow-on project entitled "Tolerance Days in Religious Schools" through which secular and religious community leaders, government officials, and others explored how to strengthen mutual understanding among faiths.

In May, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched a $1.340 million (approximately 135 million Albanian Lek (ALL)) two-year project through the NGO World Learning (WL) on fostering religious tolerance in the country. The $1.340 million total consists of $1.184 million in USG financing and a WL cost-share contribution of $0.156 million, respectively. The project seeks to support the peaceful coexistence of the 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 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 180.7 square miles, and a population of 71,670. 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 38 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, about half are active church attendees. Other religious groups include Muslims (who predominantly are represented among the estimated 2,000 North African immigrants and are split between two groups, one more fundamentalist), Anglican, 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 Vives Sicilia 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 impact any religious group.

There is no law that clearly requires legal registration and approval of religions 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. In order 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."

The Muslim community is still negotiating with the Government to acquire a building to convert it into a mosque. However, the Muslim community practices its religion without restriction.

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 continue to discuss plans 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.

Restriction 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 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 persons 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 between and among differing 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.

An opinion poll published in 2003 by the Institute of Andorran Studies on the "values and traditions of the Andorran Society," indicates 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 Vives, the leader of the Catholic community to discuss religious tolerance. The Consul General specifically discussed with and urged the Foreign Minister to take a more active stance in integrating the Muslim community into Andorra society.

ARMENIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law specifies 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 faiths.

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 November 2003, the Law on Alternative Military Service took effect on June 1, but had not been implemented by the end of the period covered by this report. The law provides "conscientious objectors" (after receiving the formal approval of a government panel) the opportunity to serve in either noncombat military or civil service duties instead of as conscripted military personnel. In June, the Government again denied the Jehovah's Witnesses application for formal registration as a religious organization. The registrar's office cited technical problems with the application. Other denominations occasionally report acts of discrimination, usually by mid-level or lower level government officials.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, societal attitudes toward some minority religions 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 a total area of 11,496 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. 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.

Religious observance was discouraged strongly 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, although many former atheists now identify themselves with the national church.

For many citizens, Christian identity is an ethnic trait, with only a loose connection to religious belief. Many Azeris left Armenia during the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988–94, increasing Armenia's religious and ethnic homogeneity. 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.

There are comparatively small, but in many cases growing, communities of other faiths. The Government does not provide figures for religious adherents, but the congregants themselves offered the following estimates: Yezidi (a Kurdish religious/ethnic group which includes elements derived from Zoroastrianism, Islam, and animism, with approximately 30,000 to 40,000 nominal adherents); Catholic, both Roman and Mekhitarist (Armenian Uniate) (approximately 180,000); Pentecostal (approximately 25,000); Greek Orthodox (approximately 1,176); Jehovah's Witnesses (approximately 7,500); Armenian Evangelical Church (approximately 5,000); Baptist (approximately 2,000); unspecified "charismatic" Christian (approximately 3,000); Seventh-day Adventist (800 to 900); the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (1,500 to 2,000); Jewish (500 to 1,000), and Baha'i (over 200). In addition, small Muslim, Hare Krishna, and pagan communities exist in the country. Yezidis are concentrated primarily in agricultural areas around Mount Aragats, northwest of 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 are approximately 1,000 Muslims, including Kurds, Iranians, and temporary residents from the Middle East.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses continue their missionary work and reported gains in membership during the period covered by this report. Evangelical Christians and Mormons also sponsor missionary programs in the country.

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.

As a result of extended negotiations between the Government and the Armenian Apostolic Church, a memorandum was signed in 2000 that provided for the two sides to negotiate a concordat. This was scheduled to occur in time for the 1,700th anniversary celebrations in 2001 of the country's conversion to Christianity; however, disagreements in some areas precluded this and negotiations were in progress at the end of the period covered by this report. The document is expected to regulate relations between the two bodies, settle disputes over ecclesiastical properties and real estate confiscated during the Soviet period, and define the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in such fields as education, morality, and the media.

The law requires all religious denominations and organizations other than the Armenian Apostolic Church to register in order to operate without restrictions. A March 2002 cabinet decision abolished the Council on Religious Affairs (CRA), and created a new office under the Prime Minister to oversee religious affairs. A high-ranking official from the former CRA was appointed as the Prime Minister's Advisor on Religious Affairs. In addition, the cabinet established the National Minorities and Religious Affairs Department, which reports to the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff. The function of registering religious groups in Armenia was transferred to the Office of the State Registrar, with the Advisor on Religious Affairs and the head of the National Minorities and Religious Affairs Department holding consultative roles in the registration process. After establishing the new agency, the Government required all groups wishing registration to reapply. 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. 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 reg-

istered 55 religious organizations, some of which are individual congregations from within the same denomination.

There is no formally operating mosque; however, Yerevan's one surviving 18th century mosque, which was restored with Iranian funding, is open for regular Friday prayers. While its legal basis is tenuous since it is not registered as a religious facility, the Government does not create any obstacles for Muslims who wish to pray there.

The law permits religious education in state schools. Government personnel train selected teachers from each school to teach the religious education curriculum. The beliefs of the Armenian Apostolic Church form the basis of this curriculum. If requested by the school principal, the Armenian Apostolic Church sends priests to teach classes in religion and religious history in those schools. Students may choose not to attend religious education classes. Many schools teach the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church as part of coursework on religion, covering global religions in elementary school and the Armenian Apostolic Church in middle school. Other 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.

The Government's new Human Rights Ombudsman, together with the head of the Department on National Minorities and Religious Affairs, 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, members of faiths other than the Armenian Apostolic Church are subject to some government restrictions. In particular the 1991 law prohibits "proselytizing" (undefined in the law), except by the Armenian Apostolic Church, and restricts unregistered groups from publishing, broadcasting, or inviting official visitors to the country.

In June, the Government again denied the application of the Jehovah's Witnesses for formal registration as a religious organization. The registrars' office cited technical problems with the application. The Jehovah's Witnesses expressed satisfaction that they were making progress toward registration and plan to correct the technical problems and resubmit their application in the near future.

According to the head of the National Minorities and Religious Affairs Department, some minority religious groups including the Molokany and some Yezidi groups, which might number in the hundreds, have not sought registration. The only previously registered religious group that was denied reregistration was the Hare Krishnas, whose membership had dropped below the 200-member threshold.

Although the law prohibits foreign funding for foreign-based churches, the Government has not enforced this ban and considers it unenforceable. Travel by religious personnel is not restricted in practice. 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

At the end of the period covered by this report, 23 members of Jehovah's Witnesses remained in prison and 3 in pretrial detention charged with draft evasion or, if forcibly drafted, with desertion due to refusal to serve; 43 members who had been serving terms were released to house arrest after serving one-third of their sentences. Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses said that those imprisoned were members of their community who had been called for military service and went directly to police to turn themselves in rather than waiting until induction to declare conscientious objection. The Law on Alternative Military Service took effect on June 1, but the Government had not created implementing regulations by the end of the reporting period. The law will allow conscientious objectors to participate in an alternative civil service instead of compulsory military duty. One alternative method would allow conscientious objectors to serve in the army without carrying arms for 36 months, and another would allow them to do civil service for 42 months. Both options are substantially longer that the 2 years of service required of those in the Army. Government officials have stated that the law would be implemented by Fall 2004; however, the Government had not formed a committee to design these regulations by the end of the period covered by this report.

There are reports that hazing of new conscripts is more severe for Yezidis and other minorities and that military and civilian security officials' treatment of members of Jehovah's Witnesses is even harsher, because their refusal to serve in the military is seen as a threat to national security.

During the period covered by this report, members of Jehovah's Witnesses did not report experiencing difficulty renting meeting places as they had reported in the

past. Lack of local official visa sponsorship means that Jehovah's Witnesses visitors must pay for tourist visas. In previous years, there were reports that government officials seized Jehovah's Witness publications at the border. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly are allowed to bring in small quantities of printed materials for their own use.

The International Helsinki Federation reported that there have been numerous allegations in recent years that members of nontraditional religions, including Jehovah's Witnesses, have been dismissed from their jobs or physically attacked due to their faith. A representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses stated that the organization was not aware of any of their members being dismissed from his or her job during the period covered by this report.

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 many major Christian denominations, including the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and major Protestant churches. In 2001, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrated the 1,700th anniversary of the official conversion of Armenia to Christianity.

Suppressed through 70 years of Soviet rule, the Armenian Apostolic Church has neither the trained priests nor the material resources to fill immediately the spiritual void created by the demise of Communist ideology. Nontraditional religious organizations are viewed with suspicion, and foreign-based denominations operate cautiously for fear of being seen as a threat by 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. As a result of the Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan, most of the country's Azeri population, who were almost all Muslim, left the country. The few Muslims remaining in the country keep a low profile, despite generally amicable relations between the Government and Iran.

There was no officially sponsored violence reported against minority religious groups during the period. 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, both because they are seen as "unpatriotic" for refusing military service and because of a widespread but unsubstantiated belief that they pay money to the desperately poor for conversions. The press reported a number of complaints lodged by citizens against members of Jehovah's Witnesses for alleged illegal proselytizing. Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses reported a few cases during the year in which the Procurator General's office sent official warnings to individual members regarding their proselytizing activities, and the group was at times the focus of verbal religious attacks and hostile preaching by some Armenian Apostolic Church clerics. In September 2003, teenagers in the town of Aparan physically assaulted four Jehovah's Witnesses. According to a Helsinki Committee report citing eye-witness accounts, a local priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church appeared to have encouraged the attack.

Although it is difficult to document, it is likely that 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, Embassy officials met with the Military Prosecutor to discuss, among other topics, hazing of minority conscripts and the status of Jehovah's Witnesses, met with government officials to discuss the proposed law on alternative military service, and continued to meet with government officials to urge that progress be made toward registering Jehovah's Witnesses. The Embassy also maintains regular contact with traveling regional representatives of foreign-based religious groups such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses 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 nongovernmental organization roundtables regarding religious freedom.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Mission 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 a total area of 32,382 square miles, and its population is an estimated 8.0 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 are 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, as the Counter-Reformation was less successful in those areas. The number of Muslims is higher than the national average in Vienna and the province of Vorarlberg, due to the higher number of guest workers from Turkey in these provinces.

Approximately 17 percent of Roman Catholics 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 is secular. The Roman Catholic Church is the predominant religion in Austria; many Roman Catholic holidays 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 may be 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 into the country religious workers 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 under the 1874 law: 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.

In 1998, when the Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities took effect, there were 12 recognized religious societies. Although the law allowed religious societies to retain their status, it imposed new criteria on other religious groups that seek to achieve this status, including 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 now meet 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.

Religious confessional communities, once they are recognized by the Government, have juridical standing, which permits them to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in their own names, contracting for goods and services, and other activities. A religious group that seeks to obtain this new status is subject to a 6-month period from the time of application to the Ministry of Education and Culture. According to the Ministry, by the end of 2003, 13 groups had applied for the status of religious confessional community, and 11 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. The Constitutional Court confirmed the decision in 2002, as did the Administrative Court in 2003.

The 10 religious groups that have constituted themselves as 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 (Pentecostalists), 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.

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 have 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 non-recognized Christian organizations, has reported that in some urban centers, particularly Vienna and some cities in Lower Austria, the number of available visas is no longer sufficient to meet demand. However, the alliance is trying to work out a solution with the Ministries of Interior and Labor to find a different visa category that is not quota-controlled. Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses noted that they have been unable to get a visa for a Tagalog speaker to minister to their Filipino community.

In September 2003, the Government opened the first Buddhist cemetery in Europe within Vienna's Central Cemetery. In February, the City of Vienna began constructing a new Islamic Cemetery in the District of Liesing.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The 1998 law allowed 12 previously recognized religious societies to retain their status; however, it imposed new criteria on other religious groups that seek to achieve that status. Numerous religious groups that the Government did not recognize, 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. An appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses arguing that the law is illegal on administrative grounds was pending before the Administrative Court at the end of the period covered by this report. The 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 under the law, despite having made numerous attempts for more than two decades, 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, 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 conservative Austrian 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 than 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 an Austrian Scientologist who was at the time a respected member of his local party organization and his local community. There are no known reports 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 reli-

gious 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. Unless students 14 years of age and over (or their parents in the case of children under the age of 14) formally withdraw from religious instruction (if offered in their religion) at the beginning of the academic year, attendance is mandatory.

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 Roman Catholic Church traditionally has been active in fostering amicable relations and promoting a dialogue among the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic communities. The international Catholic group "Pax Christi," which pursues international interreligious understanding with projects involving Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism, has a chapter in the country.

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.

The NGO Forum gegen Antisemitismus (the Forum against Anti-Semitism) reported 108 anti-Semitic incidents in 2003, including 2 attacks involving extreme violence and 2 others that involved some violence. However, members of the Jewish community stated that these numbers are not necessarily representative of the level of anti-Semitism in the country. In a report on anti-Semitism, the European Union's Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia stated that anti-Semitism in the country is characterized by diffuse and traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes rather than by acts of physical aggression.

In response to the Austrian Jewish Community's (IKG) severe financial problems, the provinces committed themselves to pay $10,976,400 (9 million euro) as advance payment of the total of $21,952,800 (18 million euro) earmarked for the IKG as compensation for property confiscated from the Jewish population during the National Socialist era. The Federal Government provides annual loans of $935,550 (770,000 euro) to the IKG.

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.

Muslims have complained about incidents of societal discrimination and verbal harassment. Several incidences of discrimination against Muslim women wearing headscarves in schools were reported since June 2003. In October 2003, a teacher at a fashion institute removed the headscarf of a Muslim girl during class, claiming that it posed a danger to her safety. Court-sponsored mediation later determined that she could not be prohibited from wearing a headscarf. In a decree issued in January, a high school in the state of Upper Austria prohibited students from covering their heads in school. A Muslim parent filed a complaint against discrimination with the local police authorities, who ordered that his daughter be allowed to wear a headscarf. The head of the Upper Austrian State School Council and the

Ministry of Education confirmed that Muslim girls and women had the right, according to legal provisions on religious freedom, to wear headscarves. Police have not identified any potential suspects for the December 2002 desecration of a Muslim cemetery in Traun. No Muslim cemeteries were desecrated during the period covered by this report.The media covered the publication of a study by GSK stating that sect and cult groups had approached "every second teenager" in the state of Lower Austria. The Government of Lower Austria co-sponsored the study and covered its release on its homepage. A CD Rom on sects called "In Search of Meaning" conceived by the Catholic diocese of Linz and distributed by the Government of the State of Upper Austria since early 2002 has been discontinued. By the end of the period covered by this report, sects were involved in the drafting of their own profiles.

The Church of Scientology has reported that individual Scientologists have experienced discrimination in hiring.

Compulsory school curricula provides for antibias 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, and the Church of Scientology.

The Embassy highlights religious freedom and tolerance in its programs. On March 1, the Embassy hosted the fourth in a series of roundtable discussions with the Turkish and Muslim community in Austria. It brought a representative of the Turkish-American society to Vienna to discuss integration issues with the Turkish-Austrian community. Approximately 100 members of the Turkish Muslim Community attended and asked questions about life for Turkish Muslims in the U.S.

In March, an Embassy-nominated Turkish-Austrian participated in the International Visitors Program to study "Managing 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 as well as 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-Muslim 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 membership 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; however, imams reported increased attendance at mosques during 2003. 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 Sumgait. Most of the country's Jews belong to one of two groups: the "Mountain Jews," who are descendents 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, descendents of European Jews who migrated to the country during Russian and Soviet rule.

These four groups (Shi'a, Sunni, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish) 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 that are considered foreign or nontraditional have been established. These include "Wahhabist" 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 Religion 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 Religion 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 2001, assumed responsibility for the registration of religious groups from the Ministry of Justice. Government authorities gave the SCWRA and its chairman, Rafig Aliyev, sweeping powers for registration; control over the publication, import, and distribution of religious literature; and the ability to suspend the activities of religious groups violating the law. 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 for occupying religious buildings registered as historical landmarks. In February and March, the city government asked the courts to evict the unregistered Juma Mosque community from its historic mosque in Baku's old city. On March 1, a Sabayil District Court judge ordered the Juma Mosque be turned over immediately to the Icheri Sheher Historical and Architectural National Park. On March 11, the Juma Mosque community filed for and received a postponement of their eviction pending an appeal. The Court of Appeals on April 22 upheld the Sabayil District Court decision to evict the Juma Mosque community from its mosque. Officials from the Ministry of Justice and police began the court-ordered eviction of the Juma Mosque Community on June 30.

Unregistered groups were more vulnerable to attacks and closures by local authorities. In 2001, religious groups were called upon to reregister 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 cumbersome, opaque, arbitrary, and restrictive. One of the primary complaints is 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 the 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.

During the period covered by this report, the Government registered 58 religious groups. Since the call for reregistration, 257 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 reregistration. The Muslim Juma Mosque community refuses to submit a complete reregistration package amid concern that provisions of the reregistration process will bring government interference in its ability to worship freely. The community argues that its 1993 registration should remain in force. Among minority religious communities that have faced reregistration problems was the Baptist denomination. Of its five main churches, three have gained reregistration; Baptist churches in Aliabad and Neftchala remain unregistered.

The Law on Religious Freedom prohibits foreigners from proselytizing. The law permits the production and dissemination of religious literature with the approval of the SCWRA; however, the authorities also appeared to restrict selectively 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 Spiritual Directorate of All-Caucasus Muslims, a Soviet-era Muftiate, which appoints Muslim clerics to mosques, monitors sermons, and organizes annual pilgrimages to Mecca for the hajj. Although it remains the first point of control for Muslim groups wishing 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 Spiritual Directorate 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 Spiritual Directorate and the SCWRA.

Religious instruction is not mandatory in public schools. In 2003, the SCWRA continued its campaign to institute a mandatory religion course in all secondary schools. A draft textbook, authored by the SCWRA Chairman, dedicates the majority of the text to Islam but includes a small portion on other traditional faiths and on some nontraditional Christian faiths. Ministry of Education officials have not approved the course, which would conflict with constitutional laws protecting secular education.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted some religious freedom 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 reregistered more than half the number of religious communities previously registered. Some groups reported that the SCWRA employees tried to interfere in the internal workings of their organizations during the registration process. Although unregistered religious groups continued to function, some reported official harassment, including break-ups of religious services and police intimidation, and beatings of worshippers by police.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the ethnic Azeri "Love" Baptist Church continued to conduct services despite losing their appeal to the Supreme Court after charges were brought in 2001 against Sari Mirzoyev, the pastor of the Church, for insulting Muslim fasting traditions in a sermon during the holy month of Ramadan. The Church lost its registration, but Mirzoyev continues to give sermons regularly.

Under the Law on Religion, 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. One of the reasons government officials cited for seeking the eviction of the Juma Mosque community from their current location was the political activity of the mosque's imam, Ilgar Ibrahimoglu. Ibrahimoglu and the leadership of the Juma Mosque community joined opposition political party lead-

er Isa Gambar's election movement, and Ibrahimoglu urged the Juma worshippers to vote against the current government.

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. Authorities warned members of the Adventist church in Ganja after they proselytized in a public school.

The Government is concerned about Islamic missionary groups (predominately Iranian and Wahhabist) that operate in the country, whose activities have been restricted in recent years. The Government closed several foreign-backed Islamic organizations as a result of reported connections to terrorist activity.

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. In late summer 2003, the Union of Baptists of Azerbaijan requested permission to import 50,000 copies of an Azeri language version of the New Testament. The SCWRA initially granted permission for only 2,000 copies. In February, the SCWRA granted permission for the importation of 10,000 copies. In March, the SCWRA quickly granted permission for the Baptists to import 5,500 copies of a religious book for children. In contrast, in April, the leader of the Baptist Union attempted to import another shipment of religious books. Customs officials refused to allow him to have the books until the SCWRA issued a letter granting him permission to import the books. The SCWRA said they could not grant permission until they had seen the books. The Baptist Union reports that customs officials would not allow them to take the books to the SCWRA until after the SCWRA granted permission for them to allow the books into the country.

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 cards. 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.

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 Armenian Church's status results in serious restrictions on the activities of other religions, primarily Christian groups. The ongoing state of war (which is regulated by a cease-fire) has led to hostility among Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh toward Jehovah's Witnesses, whose beliefs prohibit the bearing of arms. Courses in religion are mandatory in Nagorno-Karabakh schools. 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 the provinces.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials continued. Baptist leaders in the southeastern town of Neftchala reported harassment by local police in February and March. In mid-March, Baptist leaders in Baku spoke with the Neftchala government leader, who said he would see that the harassment stopped. The Neftchala Baptist community reports that there has been no harassment since then. Baptist leaders also reported harassment in the northern Gusar and Balakan regions in October and November of 2003; however, the situation has improved. The chairman of the SCWRA spoke on television in March, claiming that Adventists used financial bribes to recruit new adherents. The Adventists have denied the accusations.

In many instances, abuses reflected the popular antipathy towards ethnic Azeri converts to non-Russian Orthodox Christianity and other nontraditional religions. In February, an Adventist pastor in Naxchivan reported that local Muslim activists threatened him, and that Naxchivan police took no action when he reported the threats.

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 outlawed several Islamic humanitarian organizations because of credible reports of 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 they were kicked as police entered during morning prayers on June 30. In addition the Caucasus Muslim Board has appointed a new akhund to replace Ibrahimoglu. Worshippers have reacted with anger to news of the appointment.

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

Some religious groups in the country reported 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 period covered by this report, the Government worked actively to promote interfaith understanding. The 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 organized 15 seminars, 2 roundtables, 2 conferences, and 3 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-Muslim faiths and hostility toward 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. These broadcasts led to local harassment.

During the period covered by this report, articles critical of Wahhabism and Christian missionaries appeared in many newspapers in the country. 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 ethnic Armenians 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 remain in the country are unable to attend services at their traditional places of worship.

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 conveyed U.S. concerns about the registration process to the chairman of the SCWRA and expressed strong 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.

The Ambassador and Embassy officers maintain close contacts with leading Muslim, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish religious officials, and regularly meet with members of nonofficial religious groups to monitor religious freedom. The Ambassador and Embassy officers also work closely with nongovernmental organizations that deal with issues of religious freedom.

In November 2003, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar 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.

The status of respect for religious freedom continued to be poor during the period covered by this report. The Government formalized restrictions on religious freedom by passing a new law on religion in 2002 and signing a Concordat in 2003 with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church, that many consider to elevate the BOC's status and provide the Church with privileges not enjoyed by other faiths. Authorities continued to harass other religions and denominations. The Government has repeatedly rejected the registration applications of other religious groups, including many Protestant denominations, the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (BAOC), and some Eastern religions. Without registration many of these groups find it difficult, if not impossible, to rent or purchase property to conduct religious services. During the period covered by this report, the government-run media continued to attack non-Orthodox religious groups. Despite continued harassment, some minority faiths have been able to function if they maintain a low profile, while others have openly declared their refusal to seek reregistration under the new religion law.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, anti-Semitism and negative attitudes toward minority faiths continued.

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 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 Russian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. The Government indicates that of all persons who profess a religious faith approximately 80 percent belong to the BOC and approximately 15 to 20 percent are either practicing Roman Catholics or identify themselves with the Roman Catholic Church. Between 50,000 and 90,000 persons identify themselves as Jewish. There are a number of Protestants and adherents to the Greek Rite Catholic Church and the BAOC. Other minority religious faiths include, but are not limited to: Hare Krishnas, Hindus, Baha'i, Seventh-day Adventist, Old Believer, Muslim, Jehovah's Witnesses, Apostolic Christian, Calvinist, and Lutheran. A small community of ethnic Tatars, with roots dating back to the 11th century, practices Sunni Islam.

The country was designated an Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1989, thereby creating the BOC. Under the leadership of Patriarchal Exarch Filaret, the number of parishes throughout the country had grown to approximately 1,290 by the end of the period covered by this report. 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.

It is estimated that 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 90,000 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. A majority of the country's Jewish population 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. In 2002, a Jewish community center in Minsk opened with assistance from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Agency.

Adherents of Protestant faiths, while still small, are growing in number. Since 1990 the number of Protestant congregations, registered and unregistered, has more than doubled. According to government and independent sources, it now totals more than 1,000. The two largest Protestant groups are registered under separate Pentecostal and Baptist unions. A significant number of Protestant churches, including charismatic and Pentecostal churches, remain unregistered.

There are a number of congregations of the Greek Rite Catholic Church, which once had a membership of approximately three-quarters of the country's population but suffered from severe persecution under Russian 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. The Muslim organization, the Spiritual Office of Muslims, was established in 2002 following a split within the Belarusian Muslim Religious Association, the main organizational body of the 30,000 Muslims in the country. Although the Spiritual Office of Muslims claims that 90 percent of the Muslim community belongs to this new Muslim organization, this claim cannot be confirmed.

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 country traditions of the Belarusian people." The Committee of Religious and Nationalities Affairs of the Council of Ministers (CRNA) regulates all religious matters in the country.

In 2002, President Lukashenko formally signed a new religion law into effect, despite protests from international and domestic human rights organizations, the European Union, and domestic religious groups, including Orthodox religious groups not affiliated with the BOC. 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 the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Judaism, Sunni Islam, and Evangelical Lutheranism, groups commonly referred to as traditional faiths in society. Despite the fact that the law states its intention to guarantee religious freedom, the law contains a number of very restrictive elements that increase the Government's control of the activities of religious groups. It requires all religious groups to receive prior governmental approval to import and distribute literature and prevents foreigners from leading religious organizations, yet it denies groups the right to establish religious schools to train their own clergy. Further, the law established complex registration requirements that many religious groups, both traditional and nontraditional, have difficulty fulfilling. The new law requires all previously registered groups to reregister by November 2004 and banned immediately at the passing of the law all religious activity by unregistered religious groups.

The new law established a three-tiered structure of religious groups: religious communities, religious associations, and republican religious associations. Religious communities, or local individual religious organizations, must comprise 20 people over the age of 18 who must live in neighboring areas. To register, the 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 statues. For those communities practicing religions not previously known to the Government, information on their faith must also be submitted. According to the law, the Oblast Executive Committees (for those groups outside of Minsk) or the Minsk City Executive Committee handle all application requests. While the law denies communities the right to establish institutions to train religious clergy, it permits them to operate Sunday schools.

Religious associations are comprised of 10 communities, 1 of which must have been active in the country for at least 20 years and can only be formed by a Republican (national level) religious association. To register, associations must provide a list of members of the managing body with biographical information, proof of permission that the association can be located at its designated location, and minutes from the founding congress of the association. By law associations have the exclu-

sive right to establish religious educational institutions, invite foreigners to work with respective religious groups, and organize cloister and monastic communities.

Republican religious associations are formed only when there are active religious communities in the majority of the oblasts in the country. By law all applications to establish associations and Republican associations must be submitted to the CRNA.

The law also requires the reregistration of all religious groups that were registered before the passage of the new religion law. While the reregistration process is not clearly defined in the law, in practice the process of reregistration is similar to the general registration process. Previously registered religious communities are able to be reregistered with a minimum of 10 members, as opposed to the 20 needed for registering a new community.

According to the CRNA, as of June, 80 percent of all previously registered religious communities have reregistered. This figure reflects that 95 percent of Orthodox communities and Roman Catholic communities, 80 percent of Jewish communities, 70 percent of Protestant communities, 54 percent of Greek Catholic communities, and 50 percent of Hare Krishna communities have successfully reregistered. The CRNA reported that the only group to be denied reregistration during the period covered by this report was a Muslim community that was unable to meet the required number of people needed to reregister a religious community. The denial was not challenged by the two main Belarusian Muslim organizations. Members of the Greek Catholic Church reported that as of June, local level officials were hampering efforts by Greek Catholic communities to reregister.

A concordat between the BOC and the Government guarantees the BOC autonomy in its internal affairs and the ability to fulfill all religious rights, as well as the right to consider itself in a special relationship with the State. It 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." During the period covered by this report, the BOC has signed cooperative agreements with the Ministries of Health, Labor, Emergency Situations, Culture, Defense, Education, Sports and Tourism, and the Academy of Sciences.

In March the National Intellectual Property Center granted the BOC the exclusive right to use the word "Orthodox" in its title and granted the BOC the exclusive right 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 Orthodox faith permitted to exist in Belarus. This move could further restrict the ability of other Orthodox faiths that are not under the jurisdiction of Moscow, such as the BAOC and the True Orthodox faith, to exist 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. The Government generally considers Protestant groups to be nontraditional, but it also considers some of them to be sects. As of January, there were 27 registered religions and 2,863 religious communities: 1,290 Belarusian Orthodox, 566 Evangelical Christian, 432 Roman Catholic, 270 Baptist, 63 Seventh Day Adventist, 43 Jewish, 27 Muslim, and 13 Greek Catholic. This figure also includes other religious communities belonging to several other religious groups. Some congregations are registered only on a local basis, which provides limited rights; only religious organizations registered nationally are allowed to invite foreign religious workers and open new churches. While all registered religious organizations enjoy tax-exempt status, government subsidies are limited to the BOC. Protestant groups reported that tax authorities repeatedly fined them for their failure to pay taxes on assistance provided to destitute families and individuals. Government employees are not required to take any kind of religious oath or practice elements of a particular faith.

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 organiza-

tions whose activities incite "national, religious and racial enmity" or could "have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the people."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government increased its harassment of religious groups based not only upon the religion law but also on directives that provide additional rules and requirements for religious groups that are not outlined in the law.

According to official statistics, in the first 6 months of 2004 the CRNA registered 38 new religious communities, 7 of which were Protestant communities, as well as 9 religious organizations. However, during the period covered by this report, the CRNA continued to delay the registration of the Church of Scientology. At the end of the period covered by this report, the still unregistered BAOC was preparing to submit documents for reregistration.

According to the Forum 18 News Service, on October 23 citing "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," 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. 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.

With or without official registration, some faiths have encountered difficulty renting or purchasing property to establish places of worship, difficulty building churches (e.g., the Greek Catholics and Protestant groups), or openly training clergy.

Citizens theoretically are not prohibited from proselytizing and may speak freely about their religious beliefs; however, authorities often intervene to prevent, interfere with, or punish individuals who proselytize on behalf of some registered and unregistered religions. The Government continued to enforce a 1995 Council of Ministers decree that regulates the activities of religious workers. A 1997 Council of Ministers directive permits the teaching of religion at youth camps for registered religious groups.

Foreign missionaries are not permitted to engage in religious activities outside of the institutions that invited them. The law requires 1-year, multiple-entry "spiritual activities" visas for foreign missionaries. According to the CRNA, in 2003 Belarusian religious associations invited 956 foreign religious workers, including 254 who arrived specifically to participate in religious activities. Despite these figures, religious groups continue to experience difficulties in obtaining visas, even those that have a long history in the country. As a result of its revival since 1991, the Roman Catholic Church has experienced a shortage of qualified native clergy. At times the Church has had difficulty obtaining permission from authorities to bring in a sufficient number of foreign religious workers, primarily from Poland, to make up for the shortage. Members of the Hare Krishna community continued to report that existing legislation prevents them from inviting foreign clergy to participate in religious activities with their community, and they have not applied for any foreigners to visit them in the country.

As a result of its agreement with various government agencies, the BOC is reportedly able to enjoy beneficial tax rates on land and property, while other faiths are not always able to do so. The Protestant community claimed that Protestant churches would lose their land and property tax benefits if they leased their spare property to others that are affiliated with their faith. Having a lease agreement is an indispensable condition to secure a legal address and subsequently apply for registration as a religious group or church. Similarly, unlike the BOC, Protestant churches have lost their land and property tax benefits in instances when buildings affiliated with a church have been constructed adjacent to one another on the same property.

According to the BAOC, local officials in the Minsk Oblast town of Primorye banned two BAOC priests from entering the city after they had illegally conducted religious services there. 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, re-

gional executive committees, or the Religious Affairs Department of the Executive Committee of the city of Minsk.

Since April 2003, Grodno city authorities have repeatedly denied the registration of a foreign rabbi because he does not speak Belarusian or Russian.

According to the Government, the law permits residential property to be used for religious services once 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. Since 2000, local authorities have enforced this statute, effectively requiring all religious organizations to reregister their properties. Government figures indicated in 2002 that 110 religious communities, including 34 Protestant denominations, had their property registered through this process; however, authorities continue to deny permission to many Protestant churches, as well as other nontraditional faiths, which become caught in circular requirements. They are denied permission to convert their properties for religious uses because these groups are not registered religious groups. However, an organization must have a legal address to register. Religious groups that cannot register often are forced to meet illegally or in the homes of individual members.

According to the CRNA, in 2003 there were 227 buildings built for religious purposes, including 42 buildings for use by Protestants. However, during the period covered by this report, many traditional and nontraditional religious groups continued to experience problems obtaining property, due to government efforts to restrict the ability of these groups to establish houses of worship. In December 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.

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, nontraditional religious groups continued to be denied space in meeting halls to conduct prayer services. According to the Association of Full Gospel Christians, during the period covered by this report Minsk authorities rejected at least five applications from the Church to rent space at a local meeting hall. During the same period, Protestants filed numerous requests to the CRNA to allow them to rent property to worship, most recently in June. In its responses, the CRNA claimed that only local authorities decide whether or not to grant such permission.

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 have since offered the community three plots of land from which to choose. Authorities continue to deny permission to the registered New Life Evangelical Church to build a building to be used for religious purposes in Minsk. They first tried to build a church and then a social center, but they have been unable to do either.

In February the reconstruction of a mosque in downtown Minsk that was razed during Soviet times commenced and is expected to be completed in 2005.

In 2002 local authorities in the Minsk Oblast town of Borovlyani 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 outright. 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." The local BOC priest reportedly prepared the letter. Despite the group's appeal to the Procurator General to prove these charges, no investigation has occurred. As of June, the CRNA had yet to approve the church's renovation.

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, which some meeting hall officials have cited as a basis for canceling or refusing to extend agreements with religious groups for the use of their facilities. According to the Forum 18 News Service, in March 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.

Although it is registered officially, the Greek Catholic Church has experienced problems with the Government because of historical tensions between it and the Orthodox Church and its emphasis on the use of the Belarusian language. While the Greek Catholic Church reported that it has been easier to rent facilities for worship than in previous years, their ability to conduct regular worship at these locations is restricted by the high financial costs for securing the proper permits. 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 the April 16 issue of Znamya Novosti printed an article titled "Are There Means to Save the Soul?" which describes the activities of destructive "sects" in Belarus. According to the article, there are around 370 "sects" in Belarus; among the most "dangerous" of which are the Unification Church, the "Church of Christ", and the Church of Scientology.

An article in the March 26 issue of 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 BKGB, something later confirmed by the BKGB.

In March 2003, the Ministry of Education released a textbook titled Religious Conduct for use in religious instruction that describes Hare Krishnas, evangelical Christians, and Scientologists as "neocults" and "sects." Although the book remained in use during the period covered by this report, there were no reports of any negative consequences against students adhering to these faiths. Man, Society, and State, another textbook promoting similar ideas, also remains in use in Belarusian schools. After conducting an examination of both books, 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.

During the period covered by this report, the sale and distribution of anti-Semitic literature through state press distributors, government agencies, and at stores and events affiliated with the Belarusian Orthodox Church continued.

Despite a May 2003 order by the Prosecutor General and the Ministry of Information to remove the anti-Semitic and xenophobic newspaper Russki Vestnik, distribution of the newspaper resumed in February through the state-distribution agency Belzoyuzpechat. As in previous years, anti-Semitic literature continued to be sold at the National Academy of Sciences.

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. While the literature sold at the store originates from Russia, many of the copies sold have been reprinted by Belarusian publishing houses. Pravoslavnaya Kniga also distributed anti-Semitic literature during an October 25 meeting of the All Belarusian Cossacks' Association. In response to an appeal by a Jewish group to punish Pravoslavnaya Kniga, the Procurator General launched an investigation into the incident to determine whether or not Pravoslavnaya Kniga had illegally distributed literature that promoted intolerance. As of June, no decision had been announced. Although the BOC has stated that it maintains no ties with Pravoslavnaya Kniga, employees of the store have maintained that Pravoslavnaya Kniga is the official bookstore of the BOC.

According to the Roman Catholic Church, in April 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.

Despite the ongoing investigation into the activities of Pravoslavnaya Kniga and 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.

Restitution of religious property remained limited during the period covered by this report. There is 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. Many former synagogues in Minsk are used as theaters, museums, sports complexes, and even a beer hall; most of the Jewish community's requests to have these synagogues returned have been refused. The few returns of property to religious communities have been on an individual and inconsistent basis, and local government authorities in general are reluc-

tant to cooperate. 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 have the advantageous right to have religious property returned to them, except in cases when they are being used for cultural or sporting purposes. Official statistics indicate that from 1988–2003, the government returned over 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 had returned any former religious property to their previous owners during the period covered by this report.

Despite an October 2003 statement by President Lukashenko that the Government should not inhibit activities of the Jewish community, government officials continued to take a number of actions indicating a lack of sensitivity toward the Jewish community. Construction work continued at the site of a sports stadium in Grodno that had been originally built in the 1950s on the site of a former Jewish cemetery that existed since the 1600s. During the course of excavation, workers at the site found human remains, which were removed from the site to be collected for future reburial. Photographs taken by the Jewish community showed human remains, not only mixed in earth filling dump trucks but also mixed with earth from the site which was used to resurface a road. After intense international pressure, Grodno Oblast Governor Vladimir Savchenko signed an agreement with a national Jewish leader in August 2003 that called for an immediate cessation of excavation activity but permitted the continued construction work at the site. In November 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 the immediate cessation of excavation activity at the cemetery. Despite the fact that both agreements called for stopping excavation work at the stadium, excavation work continued at the site. In mid-June, the Grodno Jewish community reported that although excavation work had ended at the stadium, construction continued at the site.

In 2002 authorities in Mogilev decided to change the status of the city's Jewish cemetery, which authorities had officially designated as a Jewish cemetery in 2001, to a public cemetery. Under the 2001 agreement, Mogilev's burial service was obliged to allocate land for the expansion of the cemetery and not to bury anyone in the cemetery without the agreement of the local Jewish community. Despite having signed the agreement, local authorities permitted the removal of human remains and headstones from existing gravesites to make room for non-Jewish burials. Remains found during the digging were left on the ground. In June 2003, the local Jewish community sent an appeal to President Lukashenko to halt such activity. In February, the governor of Mogilev oblast restored the cemetery's status as a Jewish cemetery and ordered the burial service and city mayor to adhere to the 2001 agreement. However, according to the local community, as of June, the mayor had yet to implement this order, claiming that the Mogilev city council, which was on recess at the end of the period covered by this report, must approve the implementation of the order. In late June, the local Economic Crime Prevention Department, acting in response to an appeal by the local Jewish community, began an investigation into the legality of several burial permits issued for the cemetery. As of June 30 the investigation and the removal of remains and headstones from the cemetery continued.

On February 11, by order of the Ministry of Education, Belarusian State University closed the International Humanities Institute (IHI), which was an independent educational entity affiliated with BSU that was the only higher educational entity offering Judaica studies. IHI's various programs, including the Judaica program, were divided among several BSU faculties. Although the rector of BSU cited the break-up of IHI as part of an internal reorganization of BSU's programs, some Jewish groups expressed concerns that the move to liquidate the institute was motivated by Government retaliation for the August 2003 closure of the Israeli Embassy in Minsk and by a request of the Metropolitan Filaret who reportedly objected to the Judaica program. As of May, IHI's Judaica program continues to exist as part of BSU's curriculum but no longer as an autonomous institute.

During the period covered by this report, government officials continued to publicly make anti-Semitic statements. In a September 13 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 an October 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." In 2002 authorities in Brest arrested and later released a 17-year-old for desecrating a Holocaust memorial. According to the CRNA, the Committee regularly responds to all public expressions of xenophobia by notifying the relevant government agencies responsible for pursuing legal action against them; however, no such legal actions were observed during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government frequently took steps abusing the religious freedom of several religious groups.

Several Protestants were fined for illegally conducting and hosting religious services. 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 provides restrictions on holding rituals, rites, or ceremonies in such locations and requires prior permission from local authorities for such events.

On April 17, a court in Mozyr fined Leonid Martynovitch, Mikhail Krynets, and Vasili Bilas, three members of the unregistered International Union of Baptist Churches (IUBC), $176 (380,000 rubles) each after they had congratulated patients at a local hospital during Easter.

On November 23, 2003, local militia in Novogrudok charged Yuri Denischik, a missionary of the Novogrudok Association of Baptists with illegally leading a prayer service in a private home registered to the Association. During a search of the premises, a local official accompanying the militia accused Denischik of belonging to a "fascist sect." Denischik was later fined approximately $15 (33,000 rubles).

On December 5, 2003, according to the Forum 18 News Service, Viktor Yevtyukhov, a member of the IUBC, was fined approximately $40 (82,500 rubles) for conducting an unregistered religious ceremony in the town of Zamoshye. On December 23, Oleg Kurnosov, another member of the IUBC, was fined approximately $8 (16,500 rubles) for engaging in similar activity in the town of Dubrovna. In February, another IUBC pastor 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.

The regime continued to harass BAOC members. On June 20, Minsk Oblast and CRNA officials reportedly warned a local BAOC priest to stop his efforts to reconstruct a former BAOC church in the town of Semkov Gorodok.

During the period covered by this report, authorities continued to harass, fine, and detain Hare Krishnas for illegally distributing religious literature. The group reported that authorities continued to deport foreign Hare Krishnas that are detained by police while distributing religious literature in Belarus ostensibly for visa infractions. Throughout the period covered by this report, Minsk city authorities repeatedly denied requests by Hare Krishnas to distribute religious materials in the city.

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 officially dissolved during the period of this report.

During 2003 members of the Light of Kaylasa that were fined for their participation in unsanctioned demonstrations and protests have reported that authorities have threatened them with confiscation of property and additional legal charges should their fines go unpaid. Authorities also warned, threatened, and harassed their family members for payment. In March 2003, authorities forced the parents of one member of the group to pay the outstanding fine of their son. Members of the Light of Kaylasa reported being fired from their jobs due to their affiliation with the group. One member reported that she was fired because she was a "sektantka," member of a "cult." Local authorities told employees of one company that their company would be closed since the company's director was a member of the group.

On August 5, 2003 Minsk city authorities warned the New Life Church to cease conducting unregistered religious meetings. 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; however, anti-Semitism and negative attitudes toward minority faiths continued. According to an October 2002 poll conducted by the Independent Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Studies, 57.7 percent of respondents favored equality between various religious groups, while 33 percent felt that the Orthodox Church should receive special government privileges. However, a poll conducted by the same organization in March indicated that only 32 percent of respondents trusted the Roman Catholic Church and only 13 percent trusted the Protestant churches.

Anti-Semitism and sentiment critical of minority faiths persisted during the period covered by this report. 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. On August 27, 2003 unknown individuals firebombed a Minsk synagogue, causing minor damage. Although a police investigation was conducted, the perpetrators were not found. Valery Frolov and Vladimir Parfenovich, two deputies in the lower house of Parliament, visited the Minsk synagogue the following day and condemned the attack.

In March, a group of youths damaged 10 tombstones, 9 of which were Jewish, at a Bobrusk cemetery. The youths were caught by passers-by who took the youths to police. No charges were filed and the youths were released. In June, unknown individuals damaged several Jewish headstones at a cemetery in Cherven. On May 26, 2003, unknown individuals vandalized the Yama Holocaust memorial complex in Minska Holocaust memorial in the town of Timkovichi. In August 2002, unknown individuals vandalized a Holocaust memorial in Lida.

During the period covered by this report, unknown vandals continued to destroy crosses, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, that were erected at Kuropaty, an area used by the NKVD to murder over 300,000 people in the 1930s. The authorities made no visible attempts to find those responsible.

According to the CRNA, oblast authorities nationwide are undertaking measures to prevent the vandalization of cemeteries. These measures include the erection of fences around cemeteries, tasking local law enforcement bodies with conducting regular patrols of cemeteries, and collecting and reporting of incidents of vandalization.

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 is still active despite officially dissolving in 2000, and the National Bolshevik Party, another Russian extremist organization. In January, 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 Belarusian Jews to take provocative acts against the Government to support their cause and includes language defaming non-Jewish citizens of Belarus and prominent Belarusian 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.

The official Belarusian 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.

In April local authorities in Brest oblast refused to initiate a criminal investigation into the burglary of an evangelical Christian church in the town of Khotislav that was burglarized in March. Since 2000, the church had reportedly been vandalized six times prior to the latest incident.

During the period covered by this report, 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. Members of most non-BOC faiths have expressed their opposition to the religion law and have openly criticized the law's restrictions and vagueness. In July 2003, over 5,000 Protestants gathered in a Minsk city park to protest the religion law's passage. As of June, most of the major Protestant groups, with the exception of the Association of Full Gospel Christians, decided to seek reregistration.

In March Protestant groups sent letters to President Lukashenko, the National Assembly, and the Constitutional Court to revise restrictive elements of the religion law. The Constitutional Court, although claiming that religious groups did not have the right to appeal to the Constitutional Court on this issue, acknowledged that certain articles of the law warranted further scrutiny to verify whether they violated the constitution. The lower house of the National Assembly rejected the appeal, claiming that all of the religion laws articles were constitutional, contradicting the commentary of the Constitutional Court. As of June, the President had yet to respond to these and all previous appeals by Protestant groups to revise the law.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued a program to replace existing Belarusian passports with new passports containing the holder's tax identification number. Believing that these numbers may include numbers associated with Satanism or other superstitious beliefs, many Orthodox citizens have reportedly refused to apply for new passports. In May Metropolitan Filaret, despite having previously announced that the inclusion of tax identification numbers does not contradict Christianity, sent an appeal to the Council of Ministers to establish an alternative identification system for those who refuse to get new passports. As of June 30, the government and BOC were working together to find an amicable solution to the issue.

Prior to the passage of the law on religion, representatives of many traditional and nontraditional religious faiths established the Civil Initiative for Religious Freedom. The group actively opposed the law on religion and other government restrictions on religious groups. In January the group 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, the Civil Initiative for Religious Freedom, 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. In March representatives of Protestant, Jewish, and Hare Krishna communities participated in a 3-week Department of State International Visitors exchange program to the U.S. The participants traveled to several American cities and met with various government officials, representatives of American religious faiths, NGOs, and other organizations.

During meetings with various government officials and ministers, Embassy staff raised such issues as the religion law, the continued sale of intolerant literature at events and locations affiliated with the BOC, the ongoing dispute surrounding the Grodno Jewish cemetery and the liquidation of the International Humanities Institute. The Embassy closely 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 regularly discussed religious issues with representatives of foreign diplomatic missions in the country.

The Embassy continued to host roundtables of religious leaders to discuss relevant issues pertaining to religious freedom and government harassment. In February and March, visiting officials from the Department of State, including the Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, met with representatives of several religious groups to ascertain the religious freedom situation. Em-

bassy staff regularly met with visiting U.S. citizens interested in discussing religious freedom issues 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 monitor groups that a parliamentary commission's unofficial report labeled "harmful sects."

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, several religious groups, particularly Jews and Muslims, as well as religious groups that have not been accorded official "recognized" status by the Government, cited instances of discrimination by the public and government officials.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period covered by this report, the U.S. Government urged government officials to intensify their efforts to fight anti-Semitism and to work to resolve problems with Church of Scientology officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total 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 Catholic Church. According to these figures, the Muslim population numbers approximately 364,000, and there are an estimated 380 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 largest nonrecognized religions are Jehovah's Witnesses, with approximately 27,000 baptized members, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), with approximately 3,000 members.

Estimates indicate that approximately 15 percent of the population do not identify with any religion. Approximately 7.4 percent of the population describe themselves as laic (members of nonconfessional philosophical organizations), and another 1.1 percent belongs to organized laity.

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. However, religion still 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 generally 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 other 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 teaching, accounting by 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, 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. According to an independent academic review in 2000, the Government at all levels spent $523 million (approximately 23 billion Belgian francs) on subsidies for recognized religions in 2000. Of that amount, 79.2 percent went to the Catholic Church, 13 percent to laic organizations, 3.5 percent to Muslims, 3.2 percent to Protestants, 0.6 percent to Jews, 0.4 percent to Orthodox Christians, and 0.1 percent to Anglicans.

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 sole responsibility of the Parliament; 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.

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 Executive Council (MEC), the group recognized by the Government to represent the Islamic faith, received government funding during the period covered by this report, but mosques, imams, and Islamic schools and teachers did not. Subsidies have never been paid to mosques and imams, despite the Government's official recognition in 1999 that the MEC would serve as the administrative instrument for distributing government subsidies. Three issues have caused delay in paying subsidies to mosques and imams; two were unresolved at the time of this report. The first issue, election of a new Muslim Executive Council, was resolved but not as preferred by the MEC. The term of the interim MEC expired on May 31, but disputes between the MEC and the federal Government over election procedures have delayed holding new elections. The second problem is constitutional. The federal Government devolved responsibility for the construction and maintenance of mosques to the regional governments in 2003, but, at the end of the period covered by this report, none of the regional governments had passed the necessary implementing legislation. Finally, the MEC and the federal and regional governments must reach agreement on a list of mosques and imams that are eligible for funding.

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 6 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 (MRAX), the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme and the Liga voor Mensenrechten are also active in promoting religious freedom. The Government has volunteered to host an OSCE conference against Racism in September, as a follow-on to 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 Government continued to observe and monitor some of the nonrecognized religious groups that were included in a 1997 parliamentary committee report on "harmful sects."

This 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 189 religious sectarian organizations with comments, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Church of Scientology, and the Young Women's Christian Association. 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 bodies, but it never adopted the list, which has no legal standing.

Some religious groups included in the 1997 parliamentary list have continued to complain that their inclusion has resulted in discriminatory action against them. In July 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: an observatory of harmful sects and an interagency coordinating group on harmful sects. 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. 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, and despite its name, the regulations prohibit it from categorizing any particular group as harmful.

The Interagency Coordination Group deals primarily with confidential material and works with the legal and security institutions 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 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.

Although there have been no prosecutions of harmful sects, in June 2003, a prosecutor froze approximately $375,000 (326,000 euros) in a Church of Scientology bank account on suspicion of money laundering. Later in 2003, the prosecutor unfroze those funds; however, he continued to direct a criminal investigation into the Church of Scientology's operations on suspicion of fraud, privacy violations, and criminal association. The investigation began in 1999, and by the end of 2003, the investigating judge indicated that the investigation was nearly complete, and the case could go to trial in 2004; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, no formal charges had been filed.

One of the targets of the criminal investigation discovered in November 2003 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.

Print and broadcast coverage of the September 17 opening of the Church of Scientology's European Office for Public Affairs and Human Rights in Brussels 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 provide the Center for Information and Advice on Harmful Sects

with additional resources. The Government did not publicly dispute these allegations; however, government officials regularly state that there is no official list of "harmful sects."

In February 2002, police detained five American volunteer workers at an Assemblies of God school and media center for working without employment permits; four were deported shortly thereafter. Assemblies of God teachers for years had obtained missionary visas, which do not require work permits. The Government now says that the teachers do not qualify for that status and must have work permits but have not identified a permit for which volunteer workers could apply. The Assemblies of God leaders closed the school in the wake of the deportations. At the end of the period covered by this report, the school remained closed, and Assemblies of God officials still had not been able to find an acceptable way for foreign volunteers to teach at the school.

The Mormon Church continues to work to resolve the problem of obtaining visas for its missionaries. The Government had suspended visa issuance to Mormon missionaries for several months in 2000 and again beginning in November 2001. 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, nor do they qualify for missionary visas due to 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. As agreed, 85 pending visa applications were issued, and there do not appear to be any restrictions on the activities of visa recipients. In March 2003, Mormon Church representatives appealed to the Government to formalize the agreement in writing. At the end of the period covered by this report, there still was no written agreement.

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 have 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. Nevertheless, a Jehovah's Witnesses representative claimed that such court judgments have continued.

Religious or "moral" instruction is mandatory in public schools, provided according to the student's religious or nonreligious preference. All public schools offer a teacher for each of the six recognized religions. A seventh choice, a nonconfessional or secular moral instruction course, is available if the child does not wish to attend a religious course. Public school religion teachers are 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 are known as "Free" schools, and they receive government subsidies for working expenses and teacher salaries. Almost all of these "free" schools are Roman Catholic and they offer 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.

The Jewish community is increasingly concerned about anti-Semitism. In late June, there were several incidents of physical attacks on Jewish citizens. These incidents were prominently covered in the national media. Members of the Jewish community claimed that individual incidents involving insults and harassment occurred throughout the period covered by this report. The Anti-Racism Center stated that it received 26 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2003. This is a reduction from 62 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2002. The Anti-Racism Center received 17 more complaints of anti-Semitic incidents between February and April.

The incidents appear to be generated largely from the Muslim immigrant community and inspired by events in the Middle East. The most violent attack during the reporting period occurred on June 24, when a number of youths, allegedly North African, assaulted four Jewish students as they departed their Jewish school in an Antwerp suburb; one fleeing student was stabbed and seriously injured. Jewish students at the school previously had been subjected to verbal insult and harassment from these youths. At the end of the period covered by this report, police continued to seek the assailants. Two days after the stabbing, there was a meeting at the Jewish martyrs' monument in Brussels that was attended by federal and regional ministers and representatives of major parties, institutions, and other religions, including the head of the MEC.

The federal Minister of Justice announced on June 26 that she would require investigating magistrates to prosecute those engaged in anti-Semitic acts whether verbal, physical, or on the Internet. That same evening three Jewish students from the school that the stabbing victim attended were harassed by four youths in a car. One fired what is believed to be a toy gun at the students before driving away; there were no injuries. Later that evening, elsewhere in the Antwerp suburbs, a 13-year-old Jewish boy was beaten by three youths. An 11-year-old Moroccan and two Belgians, ages 8 and 16, were arrested and charged with racism-motivated assault and battery by a court for youthful offenders; they were required to apologize to the victim and pay damages. Also that evening, several immigrant youths reportedly kicked a Jewish youth repeatedly on the main street of Antwerp, before escaping.

On June 28, at a demonstration to protest growing anti-Semitism, the mayor of Antwerp promised the city's Jewish community that the police would give the problem their highest priority. On June 29, the federal Minister of Interior announced increased police protection at places such as schools and synagogues frequented by the Jewish community and said that the federal Government would investigate other measures. On June 30, Prime Minister Verhofstadt met Jewish community leaders, expressed the Government's concern regarding the attacks, and noted the increased police protection. The following day, he told Parliament that such attacks were attacks on the country's fundamental values and institutions and would not be tolerated. The judicial system has been tasked with giving such attacks full priority. For example, in Brussels 61 investigations and an indictment are in process, with similar efforts underway in Antwerp. The Prime Minister also pledged to urge the regions to intensify educational efforts to counter anti-Semitism and racism. Jewish community leaders have indicated to foreign diplomatic observers that they were assured by government efforts, but they remained apprehensive regarding this outbreak of violence.

On January 28, during an indoor soccer match between Belgium and Israel, spectators with Hamas and Hizballah banners heckled the Israelis and shouted anti-Semitic slogans, some in Arabic. The city of Hasselt (where the match took place), the Anti-Racism Center, and a local Jewish organization filed a criminal complaint over the incident a few days later, which the police continue to pursue actively; the case is still under investigation. No arrests were made during the period covered by this report. In February a group of students at a Jewish school in Brussels were assaulted by youths from the neighborhood, which currently is inhabited primarily by Muslim immigrants.

In June 2003, there was an attempted car bombing at the synagogue in Charleroi. A perpetrator was apprehended at the time; he later was assessed as mentally incompetent and was institutionalized.

There also continue to be a few cases of anti-Semitic speech (although not attacks) generated from individuals from extreme right, neo-Nazi groups. These also are pursued by the Anti-Racism Center, which won a conviction in September 2003 against two Holocaust deniers, such denial being illegal in the country; the two were sentenced to a year in prison, a $561 (500 euro) fine, and the costs of the trial. Government officials continued to condemn strongly attacks on the Jewish community and maintained increased security around synagogues and Jewish community buildings. The Government has responded directly to Jewish community concern. The Prime Minister has received Jewish community representatives and pledged the Government's full attention to the problem, most recently on June 30; in May police protection was increased. The Minister of Social Integration convoked a working group, including the Ministers of Justice and Interior, enforcement agencies, the Anti-Racism Center, and representatives of the Jewish community. In May she also mandated the compilation of research on the problem and perceptions of it; the report is scheduled for publication in September.

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 May the center released a report covering 2003 providing, 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 MEC maintains contacts with leaders of other faiths, including both recognized and unrecognized religious groups. Following the stabbing of the Jewish student on June 25 in Antwerp, he was seen on television with the Chief Rabbi at a public meeting in Brussels to denounce the 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.

U.S. Embassy representatives discussed the issue of religious freedom with officials from 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-Semetic incidents and urged the Government to intensify its efforts to counter this trend. Embassy officials and the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues also urged the Government to join the international Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The Government has taken initial steps to join, including sending an observer to a Task Force meeting and beginning consultations with the regional and linguistic governments.

There is an ongoing dialogue between Embassy officials and the Ministry of Justice at the cabinet level regarding the effects of the recommendations of the (never voted-upon) 1997 parliamentary report on sectarian organizations. Embassy officials raised religious freedom issues at various levels. For example, the Embassy raised concerns of the Church of Scientology with the Federal Prosecutor's office. As part of ongoing efforts to find a permanent solution for Mormon, Assemblies of God, and other religious volunteers who have faced difficulties obtaining visas and residence permits for missionary or other volunteer religious work, Embassy officials sought written clarification from the Minister of Labor regarding the requirement for volunteers to obtain work permits. Communications between the Ministry of Labor and the Embassy on this issue were continuing at the end of the period covered by this report.

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 mixed areas or in areas where they are adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of minority religions in non-ethnically mixed areas have had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently. The new state-level Law on Religious Freedom, enacted in January, also provides comprehensive rights to religious communities and confers upon them a legal status not previously held in the country.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report; however, there was some deterioration and some improvement in certain areas. Religious communities strongly supported refugee returns for their respective constituencies; however, there was a lack of movement on refugee returns. The return process suffered from a lack of funds, local governments' inability or unwillingness to provide necessary services to allow for sustainable returns, and a lack of employment opportunities. The new 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. Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) generally are associated with Islam, Bosnian

Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs with the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Jewish community maintains a very small but important presence in Bosnian society. Despite the constitutional and legal provisions protecting religious freedom, some 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.

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 RS, with a separate administrative district comprising Brcko. The country has a total area of 19,781 square miles. In 2001, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that the population was 3.8 million, although a reliable census had 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, Serbian 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 is an increasingly visible presence of more conservative missionaries who practice the Saudi-based form of Islam, Wahabbism, although the numbers remain very low.

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. The majority of Bosnian Muslims have a secular, European-oriented worldview and practice their religion only intermittently. For Bosnian Muslims, religion often serves as a community 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 three major faiths claim that observance is increasing among younger persons 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 Bosnian war. Leaders from the three main religious communities observed that they enjoy greater support from their believers in rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than urban centers such as Sarajevo or Banja Luka.

Ethnic cleansing during the 1992–1995 war caused internal migration, which almost completely segregated the population into separate ethno-religious areas. Increased levels of returns in 2001–2002 slowed markedly in 2003–2004, leaving the majority of Serbian 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 Serbian Orthodox adherents and Muslims in recent years to their prewar homes in Western Bosnia Canton and Muslims to their prewar homes in eastern Bosnia near Srebrenica have shifted notably the ethno-religious composition in both areas.

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 and Herzegovina are located in the Federation in cities such as Travnik, Bocinja/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 servicing Trebinje and Bijeljina. The small Jewish community, like most other small religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina 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, the Methodist Church, the Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Krishna Consciousness. In addition, Wahabbism, is slowly gaining adherents in Bosnia and Herzegovina in large part due to economic problems facing the impoverished Bosniak populace.

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 mixed areas or in areas where they were adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of minority religions in non-ethnically mixed areas had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently.

The State Constitution attempts to safeguard the rights of the three major ethnic groups, and by extension the three major religious communities, by providing for each group proportional representation in Government and in the military. As a result of the government structure created by the Dayton agreement, which ended the Bosnian conflict, parliamentary seats and most government positions are apportioned specifically to members of the three "constituent peoples" (Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs). These stipulations result in a 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 new state-level 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 and Herzegovina. It grants churches and religious communities legal status and allows them concessions that are characteristic of a non-governmental 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. According to the provisions of the law, 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 new law will allow minority religions in the country to register legally and to operate without unwarranted restrictions. The law came into force in March and the establishment of the registry was underway by the end of the period covered by this report.

Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remain powerful in the country. Most political parties continue to identify closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic group; however, many political parties claim to be multiethnic. Some clerics have characterized hard-line nationalist political sympathies as part of "true" religious practice, with the Roman Catholic Church being the most vocal in the political arena. The Roman Catholic Church maintains that the implementation of some international community-backed reforms, such as education reform, undermines the Bosnian Croat sense of nationhood. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the country and the nationalist Bosnian Croat party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), jointly resisted efforts to unify the disjointed and ethnically based education system.

The lines dividing politics and religion are often blurred, particularly during an election season, 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.

In 2003, the RS Government spent approximately $330,980 (600,000 KM) on assistance to religious groups. In 2004, the RS Government planned to allocate funds to all four traditional religious communities in the RS, but was forced to postpone the disbursement of most funds due to budgetary shortfalls. The RS plans to dis-

tribute the funds to the religious communities in the second half of 2004, and the majority will go to the reconstruction of religious facilities. The Islamic community in the RS is expected to receive approximately $123,457 (200,000 KM) in the second half of this year and had already received $18,519 (30,000 KM) in early 2004. The Jewish community is expected to receive funds for the reconstruction of a synagogue in Banja Luka.

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 have the option not to attend, but in practice, students of the majority religion face pressure from teachers and peers to attend the classes. For example, the RS requires Serbs to attend religion classes but does not require attendance for Bosniaks and Croats. If more than 20 Bosniaks or Croats attend a particular school in the RS, the school is required to organize religion classes on their behalf. However, in the rural RS, there is usually no qualified religious representative available to teach religious studies to the handful of Bosniak or Croat students. It is similar in the Federation, where students of the ethnic majority are required to attend religious classes, either Bosniak or Croat, while the minority is not required to attend. 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, and Zenica/Vares, Croat students may attend Catholic school centers. 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. 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 new state-level 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 pre-schools, primary schools, and universities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, by the end of the reporting period, the Law on Religious Freedom had not been implemented. Its implementation could be difficult in Bosnia's often-segregated school systems, particularly at the municipal level.

The Office of the High Representative (OHR) 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 is being implemented as part of the official school curriculum in all Federation cantons, the RS, and Brcko.

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 new state-level Law on Religious Freedom provides Churches and 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 of restitution.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restrict religious freedom and pose major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases, the RS Government, local governments, and police forces made some improvements in protecting religious freedoms, although problems remained, including an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom may occur.

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 only has Serbian 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 at the end of the period covered by this report.

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 1992–1995 war. Local police also subsequently failed to conduct a serious investigation into several of the incidents. More recently, the RS Government has mediated a number of disputes between religious communities and local governments, resulting in the issuance of permits in virtually all of the outstanding reconstruction cases from 2001–2002, including permits for all five mosques being reconstructed in Bijeljina, for mosques in Trebinje, and for other disputed cases. 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.

In July 2003, the Federation's Human Rights Chamber transformed itself into a component of the Constitutional Court. The Human Rights Chamber had been established under the Dayton Agreement and issued rulings that at times affect religious freedom, particularly regarding religious properties. Before its transfer of authority to the Constitutional Court, the Human Rights Chamber in June 2003 found Travnik municipality in the Federation to be in violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The municipality had returned property to the Islamic community but not to the Roman Catholic community. The Chamber ordered the Federation to expedite relocations of public schools housed in the Roman Catholic school building in Travnik by June so that remaining portions of the building could be returned to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. As of June, the impasse over the school in Travnik remained unresolved.

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. Outstanding and publicly thorny restitution cases include 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 an Islamic mosque on the former property of a Serb Orthodox Church in Bradina; and the presence of a Serb Orthodox Church in the middle of a majority Islamic community in the RS town of Divic.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The RS Government, local governments, and police forces frequently allowed an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom could take place, although there was marked improvement from previous years as demonstrated by the relative lack of religious and ethnically motivated incidents in the country during the tense security crisis in nearby Kosovo and Serbia and Montenegro in March. 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 delayed the return of minority refugees in many areas.

A significant number of citizens remained displaced internally or as refugees abroad following the 1992–1995 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. Although organized and spontaneous returns significantly increased in 2001–2002, they began to fall sharply in 2003–2004.

A variety of incidents directed at religious targets in all three ethnic majority areas were reported throughout 2003 and the first half of 2004. In August 2003, a group of intoxicated youths in Livno threw bottles and shouted insults at the Podhum mosque. The youths were arrested and fined. In August 2003, 17 gravestones were vandalized at the St. Mihovil and St. Marko cemeteries in Sarajevo; the Bosnian tri-partite presidency quickly condemned the acts of vandalism and 3 Bosnian Muslim youths were arrested soon thereafter.

In September 2003, unknown perpetrators seriously damaged a portion of the minaret and support structure at the Ali-Aqa mosque in Derventa. In a likely related attack, the windows of the nearby Saint Juraj Catholic Church were smashed

on the same evening. Also in September 2003, unknown perpetrators smashed two windows of the Catholic Parish Church in Zenica. In October 2003, a hand grenade was discovered at the construction site of the Osman-Pasha mosque in Trebinje. In November 2003, an unknown assailant fired shots at a mosque in the village of Cela near Prijedor during Ramadan.

Incidents directed at Bosniak Muslims during the last months of the period covered by this report included: In January, unknown assailants fired shots and caused damage to the mosque in the village of Polje near Bosanska Dubica using automatic rifles. In March, unknown perpetrators bombed a mosque in the predominately Bosnian Serb town of Gradiska, just 3 days after arsonists set a Serb Orthodox Church on fire in the Federation. Political leaders from all circles publicly condemned the attack and the local police commander was quickly replaced. In March, unknown perpetrators smashed the windows of the mosque in Banja Luka, while a Bosnian Muslim graveyard memorial was damaged near Tuzla in April.

In March, the press reported that a Serb Orthodox priest in the eastern RS town of Pale stated publicly that it is the duty of each Orthodox priest to protect and help indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic. The priest allegedly called for the return of the Chetnik tradition and the reawakening of the Serb "consciousness."

There were also incidents directed at Bosnian Croats during the last months of the period covered by this report. In April, there was an attempted arson at the Chapel of Saint Anthony in the northern Bosnian town of Zivinice, while an unknown perpetrator that same month damaged gravestones in a Catholic cemetery in Zenica. In March, vandals damaged 14 crosses on the premises of the Catholic Church in Stolac near Mostar.

During Easter 2004, the Catholic Church seminary in Sarajevo was stoned. In April, unknown perpetrators vandalized a Catholic cemetery in Banja Luka.

The Banja Luka District Court continued criminal proceedings for war crimes against the 11 former police officers from Prijedor in connection with the 1995 abduction and murder of Father Tomislav Matanovic and his parents. In September 2003, the District Court judge scheduled to try the Matanovic case resigned; by year's end, it was unclear if and when the trial would begin. In late January, the public prosecutor charged the suspects with war crimes against the civilian population. There were no further developments in the period covered by this report.

Incidents directed at the Roman Catholic Church during the last months of the period covered by this report included: On April 5, there was an attempt to set fire to the Catholic Chapel in Zivinice in the Tuzla Canton, in northeast Bosnia. Police did not arrest any of the perpetrators. On April 13, unknown perpetrators broke into the Travnik Parish church in Ovcavero and stole $4000 (6,000 KM).

There were incidents directed against members of the Bosnian Serb Orthodox community during the period covered by this report. In March, unknown perpetrators in the Federation's Bugojno municipality set the roof of the Serb Orthodox Church on fire, resulting in minor damage and no injuries. The incident occurred at a time of heightened tensions as a result of serious security problems in Kosovo. Senior local politicians from all ethnic groups quickly condemned the arson attack.

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 and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In September 2003, former U.S. President Bill Clinton officially opened the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial and Cemetery, which serves as an important part of the reconciliation process in the country. Senior politicians as well as religious leaders paid homage to the victims of Srebrenica in a solemn event that was well attended by many ethnic and religious groups. The RS police ensured that no major security incidents occurred, although graffiti with slogans praising Bosnian Serb war criminals was found on posters near the Memorial site. Serb Orthodox leaders and senior RS politicians were notably absent from the event, demonstrating an unwillingness to come to grips with the tragedy of Srebrenica.

Relations among religious communities in the Croat-dominated Stolac municipality in the Federation continued to improve over the period covered by this report. In August 2003, the reconstructed Carsjiska mosque in Stolac was officially opened during a ceremony that drew thousands of believers, including the highest Muslim

official in Bosnia Reis ul-ulema ef Ceric. Some tensions remain between the Catholic and Muslim communities, as evidenced by the absence of Bosnian Croat municipal officials and representatives from the Catholic Church at the opening of the mosque. There have been no recent incidents of violence against returnees, although minor acts of vandalism against religious facilities still occur.

The reconstruction of three destroyed mosques began in Croat-dominated west Mostar. One of the mosques in west Mostar was still under construction by the end of the period covered by this report, while another was successfully completed and inaugurated in May; however, no Catholic Church officials attended the opening. The third mosque in Balinovic was completed but recently was attacked by vandals. Finances, more than religious discrimination, hampered further work on mosques in the Mostar area.

In June 2003, a foundation stone was laid for the reconstruction of Esma Sultana's mosque in Jajce, and the Travnik mufti in April expressed satisfaction with the pace of reconstruction. The mosque, originally constructed 340 years ago, had been destroyed in 1993.

In Vogosca, a suburb of Sarajevo, the first cornerstone for the construction of a new Catholic Church was laid in Spring 2004, the first such new construction in Sarajevo since the end of the war. In Bosniak-dominated Bradina, Konjic municipality, the Islamic community agreed to remove a mosque that had been constructed on someone else's land, although there has been no action taken to remove the illegal mosque by the end of the period covered by this report.

Although in April 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 due to a lack of funds. Several mosques have been reconstructed in the RS over the last year including in Kotarsko near Doboj, in the village of Sjenina near Doboj, Kozarac near Prijedor, in Srebrenica, two in Banja Luka (although not officially opened), in Bosanski Novi, and in Bosanska Gradiska. Mosques in Kopaci, Ustipraca, and two in Zvornik remain under reconstruction as of this reporting period. In April, the RS Ministry for Urban Planning approved the reconstruction of the Carsijska mosque in Prijedor.

A new mosque was constructed in Kupres, and there are preparations for the reconstruction of mosques in the RS villages of Kratina, Isbisno, and Popov Most in the Foca municipality as well. Approximately 30 percent of the largest mosque in Bijelina, the Atika mosque, had been completed, although reconstruction on the other four mosques had not begun by the end of the period covered by this report. On December 20, 2003, the seat of the Islamic community in Bratunac was reconstructed and opened.

Reconstruction of a Catholic church in Prijedor neared completion during the period covered by this report.

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. Under the Communists, most of the country's population identified themselves by ethnic group or simply as "Yugoslavs." Only with the adoption of the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution could Muslims identify themselves as such in the census. Since the country's independence, 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 1992–1995 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 approximately 270,000 deaths it caused contributed to mutual suspicion 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 is significantly worse in the RS, particularly in the eastern RS, and

it remains a serious problem in Croat-dominated areas of the Federation; discrimination appears also to have worsened in some Bosniak-majority areas where more conservative Islamic communities reside.

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. Media reports increasingly discussed the "Islamicization" of Sarajevo and some non-Muslims reported feeling "out of place" in the nation's capital. Youths and hooligans generally are responsible for the majority of acts of vandalism in Sarajevo and across the country. While religious leaders applaud growing religious sentiment among youth, the scars of the war, economic woes, 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 is targeted against religious communities.

Numerous buildings belonging to the Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic communities were damaged or destroyed during the 1992–1995 war, usually in a deliberate attempt at ethnic intimidation. The religious buildings destroyed during the war included 618 mosques and 129 churches in RS territory. RS authorities frequently did not intervene to prevent the violent obstruction of efforts to rebuild many of the mosques and churches. Despite the issuance of building permits these last several years on the part of Federation and RS authorities, the religious communities lack funds to rebuild religious facilities. In response, the Islamic community in April planned to file charges with the Federation Constitutional Court seeking damages from the RS for the destruction of its mosques during the war.

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 Plehan near Derventa, but there is now some movement on rebuilding these mosques. After violent efforts to obstruct the reconstruction of Osman Pasha Mosque in Trebinje, the rebuilding process finally commenced in June although violent acts against the mosque occurred during period covered by this report. Reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka had not begun by the end of the period covered by this report, but the Islamic community had all the necessary permits and was collecting money for its construction.

Acts of anti-Semitism against the small Jewish community in the country are significantly less frequent that in other parts of Europe. However, Jewish leaders state that there is a growing tendency in the country to mix anti-Israeli sentiment with rare acts of anti-Semitism, as the general public and media often fail to distinguish between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Following the terrorist attack against a mosque in Turkey during the period covered by this report, the Jewish community was quickly granted police security at its synagogues and no incidents were reported.

Despite the lack of overt anti-Semitic acts, there were two particularly vocal websites in Bosnia and Herzegovina that allowed their audience to express their resentment against non-Muslims. They advocated the boycott of American and Jewish companies and both called for Muslims to avoid interacting with Christians and Jewish persons.

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 participate in the Interreligious Affairs Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which operates with the active involvement of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, a U.S.-based NGO. Although the traditional religious communities have not wavered in their commitment to national reconciliation, there were rifts between the faiths on the Council during the period covered by this report. The Roman Catholic Church "froze" its relations with the Council over differences regarding the signing of a bilateral agreement with the Vatican. The Serb Orthodox Church pulled out of the Interreligous Council entirely due to differences of opinion on political and security matters, primarily dealing with NATO's early April raid on Orthodox Church premises in Pale in search of indicted war criminals, when a Serb priest and his son were accidentally injured. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Office of the High Representative seek 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 three major 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.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Government succeeded in encouraging the State Constitutional Court to assume human rights cases, including those involving religious freedoms, to promote high-level national attention to such cases. The Ambassador frequently meets with the principal religious leaders, individually and collectively, to urge them to work toward moderation and multiethnicity. The Ambassador has been involved actively as a member of the Executive Board of the Srebrenica Foundation, which oversaw the construction of a Memorial and Cemetery dedicated to victims of the 1995 massacre of Muslims in Potocari. The U.S. Government provided approximately $1 million (1.62 million KM) 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 democracy courses on "Democracy and Human Rights" and the "Culture of Religion," using its SEED funds and continues to support its implementation. The comparative religion course, "Culture of Religion," was still under discussion at the end of the period covered by this report.

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, and creating university linkage affiliation focusing on comparative religious studies. The Embassy publicly criticizes instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities or buildings (most recently, the Ambassador strongly condemned the March arson attack against the Serb Orthodox Church in Bugonjo) and encourages leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to respond equally strongly. The U.S. Agency for International Development provides funding to train lawyers and judges on human rights, including religious freedom, and provides much-needed infrastructure assistance to areas with high rates of refugee return to promote the sustainability of return.

BULGARIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in practice for some nontraditional religious groups. These restrictions are manifested primarily in a registration process that is selective, slow, and nontransparent. The Government prohibits the public practice of religion by unregistered groups.

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 of some nontraditional religious groups remained an intermittent problem. Concerns about Islamic fundamentalism continued to receive media coverage.

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 42,855 square miles, and its population is approximately 7.9 million according to the 2001 census. The National Statistical Institute reported that 82.6 percent of citizens are Orthodox Christians and 12.2 percent are Muslims, while the remainder includes Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Gregorian-Armenian Christians, Uniate Catholics, and others. Official registration of religious organizations with the Government increased 25 percent, from 36 in 2003 to a total of 45 denominations in addition to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) at the end of the reporting period. According to the Sofia Municipal Court, which is responsible for registering all legal entities, including religious denominations, an additional eight denominations were in the process of being registered. Since the court assumed the role of registering religious denominations at the beginning of 2003, all denominations previously registered before the enactment of the 2002 Confessions Act have been reregistered.

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" (descendents of Slavic Bulgarians who converted to Islam centuries ago under Ottoman rule). At the western extreme of the Rhodopes, there are greater numbers of Pomaks, and on the eastern end, more ethnic Turks. Muslim ethnic Turks and Roma 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. There are comparatively large numbers of Roman Catholics in Plovdiv, Assenovgrad, and in cities along the Danube River. Eastern Rite Catholic communities are located in Sofia and Smolyan. Many members of the country's small Jewish community live in Sofia, Ruse, and along the Black Sea coast. However, Protestants are dispersed more widely throughout the country. While clear statistics are not available, evangelical Protestant church groups have had particular success in attracting numerous converts from among the ethnic Roma minority, and these churches tend to be the most active denominations in predominantly Roma-inhabited areas.

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 Catholic community also are regarded as more likely than members of other faiths to attend religious services regularly.

Missionaries are present in the country, including, for example, representatives of evangelical Protestant churches and more than 100 missionaries from the 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; however, some local authorities restricted this right in practice for some nontraditional religious groups. The Constitution designates Orthodox Christianity, represented by the BOC, as the "traditional" religion, and the Government provided financial support to it as well as to several other religious communities perceived as holding historic places in society, such as the Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Jewish faiths.

The 2002 Confessions Act replaced the universally unpopular Communist-created law of 1949. Religious and human rights groups strongly criticized the 2002 law for the preferential treatment given to the BOC and for provisions that appear to take sides in what many saw as an internal Church conflict. Under the 2002 law, all religious groups, with the exception of the BOC, must register with the Sofia Municipal Court before they can practice their beliefs in public. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) also expressed concern at the requirement for groups to submit a statement of beliefs when applying for registration or reregistration, stating that this constituted an infringement on their freedom of religion. There were initial fears regarding the exclusive right of Religious Denominations Directorate of the Council of Ministers to give "expert opinions" to the court regarding registration matters; however, in practice the Directorate only provides an opinion upon request by the court. Such opinions have resulted in the rejection of registration for only one denomination, the Achmadi Muslim Organization of the Muslim Achmadi Community. However, all applicants have the right to appeal the denial of registration through the Court of Appeals, where "expert opinions" from other sources can be submitted and taken into account. An appeal by the Achmadi Muslim Organization of the Muslim Achmadi Community currently is pending. 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 registration of denominations.

A Council of Europe review of the 2002 Confessions 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 outline any recourse if a competent court refuses to grant registration.

In December 2003, a national conference of Muslim leaders convened in Sofia and elected Fikri Sali as the new chief mufti to replace Selim Mehmed; Sali formerly held the position from 1992–94. However, a rival conference was convened by another former chief mufti, Nedim Gendzhev, and selected Ali Hajji Saduk to replace Mehmed. While Sali's election was confirmed by the Bulgarian Higher Islamic Council, Gendzhev's conference submitted documentation listing Saduk as the new

chief mufti with the Sofia Municipal Court first. A registration controversy has ensued, leaving no legally recognized successor to Mehmed.

According to both a judge from the Sofia Municipal Court and the Religious Denominations Directorate of the Council of Ministers, due to the 2002 Confessions Act's lack of specific provisions regulating the change in leadership of registered denominations, the Sofia Municipal Court has no authority to decide which of the two elected muftis is Mehmed's rightful successor. The only option for resolving the controversy is for the two parties to file civil claims in court.

For most registered religious groups there were no restrictions on attendance at religious services or on private religious instruction. A Jewish school, three Islamic schools, the university-level Islamic Higher Institute, a Muslim cultural center, a multidenominational Protestant seminary, and university theological faculties operated freely. Bibles, Korans, and other religious materials in the Bulgarian language were imported or printed freely, and religious publications were produced regularly.

Optional religious education courses are offered in state-run schools. Following the successful introduction of a program to provide optional Islamic education classes in public schools in 2002 using a textbook proposed by the Chief Mufti and approved by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry agreed to assist with funding for such courses during the year. The Ministry announced that approximately 18,000 primary and secondary school students attend religion classes. The Chief Mufti's office also supports summer Koranic education courses.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted religious freedom through a registration process that is selective, slow, and nontransparent. The Government prohibits the public practice of religion by groups that are not registered.

The 2002 Confessions Act designates the Bishop of Sofia, currently Patriarch Maksim, as the Patriarch of the BOC. Furthermore, it 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. Effectively, this prohibits members of the so-called "alternative synod," which has been in conflict with Patriarch Maksim since 1992, from formally registering as the Bulgarian Orthodox Church or from claiming any of the Church property currently under its control.

In July 2002, Stefan Kamberov, a 66-year-old priest associated with the alternative synod, was murdered near the St. Panteleimon Monastery near Dobrinshte. Two suspects were arrested and released on bail of $1,250 (2,000 leva) each. The case was awaiting prosecution following the conclusion of the investigative stage almost 2 years after Kamberov's murder. While the observance of religious freedom has improved for some nontraditional groups, some religious groups continued to face limited discrimination and antipathy from some local authorities, despite successfully registering through the Sofia Municipal Court. Article 21 of the 2002 Confessions Act states that nationally registered religions may have local branches according to their statute; however, the act does not require local registration of denominations, although some municipalities have claimed that it does. Local branches have experienced problems with such municipalities; for example, mayors in the towns of Lovech, Troyan and Varakel exceeded their powers by demanding that local branches of religious organizations provide documentation not required by law.

Certain localities like Burgas have been consistently hostile to nontraditional groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses. In the past under the 1949 Religion Law, the Burgas municipal council rejected the registration application of the local branch of Jehovah's Witnesses. Since the passage of the 2002 Confessions Act, the Burgas municipality maintains that no follow-up registration application has been received from Jehovah's Witnesses. The locally elected municipal authorities in Burgas, responding to public demonstrations in 2002 against a Jehovah's Witnesses prayer house being built too close to a public school, used their "public order" powers to stop construction of the prayer house. The Religious Denominations Directorate of the Council of Ministers supported an appeal to the regional authorities. Construction of the building is still pending, partly because the municipality invoked the local ordinance limiting places of worship to religious organizations' officially registered addresses.

In May 2003, police reportedly prevented the registered International Baptist Church in Sofia from using a privately rented apartment for Bible studies and language classes. The church was forced to abandon its lease and conducted its meetings in various private homes.Although several municipalities such as Burgas, Plovdiv, Pleven, Gorna Oryahovista, and Stara Zagora previously had passed local ordinances that curtailed religious practices, often in contravention of the Constitu-

tion and international law, it does not appear that these ordinances have been strictly enforced.

A number of religious groups recognized that foreign-national missionaries and religious leaders experienced difficulties in obtaining and renewing residence visas in the country due to a 2001 amendment to the Law on Foreign Persons. The revised law has no visa category that explicitly applies to missionaries or religious workers, and rules for other categories of temporary residence visa (such as self-employed or business-owner) have been tightened in ways that seem to make it more difficult for religious workers to qualify. This problem has been exacerbated by the fact that key government institutions have not yet developed implementing regulations or procedures to handle their new responsibilities under the law, despite the new law being in force. Missionaries, therefore, may have to limit the length and purpose of their visits to the 30 days accorded to tourists. The high school curriculum included a course on religion initiated by the Ministry of Education. The original plan called for a world religion course that avoided endorsing any particular faith; however, members of non-Orthodox religious groups, especially ethnic-Turkish Muslims, maintained that the BOC received privileged coverage in the textbooks. The religion course is optional, and it is not available at all schools. Following the successful introduction of optional Islamic education courses in 2002 and the expected development of additional courses during the year, there has been some discussion of requiring all students to enroll in a course on religion. Students would have the option of which course they wish to take. 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, NGOs and certain denominations claimed that a number of their properties confiscated under the Communist years have not been returned. For example, the Muslim community claims that at least 17 properties have not been returned. The BOC, Catholic Church, Methodists, Congregationalists, Adventists, and other groups also claim land or buildings in Sofia and other towns. Former Jewish properties have been recovered over the last 10 years, with one exception in downtown Sofia that is pending before the court. 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 September 9, 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.

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 OrganizationsThere 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 initial fears that the 2002 Confessions Act would hamper religious organizations' ability to operate freely, there have been no reports of previously registered entities being refused registration. In fact 15 new religious organizations have registered with the Sofia Municipal Court since 2003.

The legal requirement that groups whose activities have a religious element must register with the Sofia Municipal Court was an obstacle to the activity of some religious groups, such as the Sofia Church of Christ and the Unification Church during the previous reporting period; however, since 2003, 15 new denominations, including the Sofia Church of Christ, have registered with the Sofia Municipal Court, and 8 other denominations had registration applications pending. There were no subsequent reports that the requirement to register with the Sofia Municipal Court was an obstacle to the activity of religious groups during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance of some nontraditional religious groups remained an intermittent problem. Strongly held suspicion of evangelical denominations among the populace is widespread and pervasive across the political spectrum and has resulted in discrimination. Often cloaked in a veneer of "patriotism," mistrust of the religious beliefs of others is com-

mon. Such mainstream public pressure for the containment of "foreign religious sects" inevitably influences policymakers. Nevertheless, human rights observers agreed that such discrimination has gradually lessened over the last 5 years as society has appeared to become more accepting of nontraditional 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. Embassy regularly monitors religious freedom in ongoing contacts with government officials, clergy, lay leaders of minority communities, and NGOs. Embassy officers met with Orthodox clergy members, the Chief Mufti and senior Muslim leaders, religious and lay leaders of the Jewish community, and leaders of numerous Protestant denominations. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy remained closely engaged with government, religious officials, and NGOs concerning the 2002 Confessions Act and registration of religious organizations; with various religious groups regarding the restitution of properties; and with Muslim leaders regarding Islamic extremism.

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 December 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 have been victimized by the ethnic conflicts that led to the breakup of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. There were continued 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 meet 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 eastern religions. A variety of missionaries are present in the country, 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 the Campus Crusades 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 position 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. However, in 2002 some religious leaders and political parties expressed concern over instituting Catholic catechism in kindergarten, as established in the Concordat agreements between the Vatican and the Government. 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 July 2002.

In January 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 6 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 5 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 May, approximately 35 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. No specific licensing is required for foreign missionaries.

Representatives of minority religious communities indicate that the overall climate for religious freedom has improved since the period covered by the previous report. 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 (December 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 (July 2003); and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, and Croatian Old Catholic Church (October 2003). In addition, in October 2003, the Government adopted unilaterally an agreement with the Jewish Community of Zagreb, which refused to sign the agreement due to 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-Catholic religions have expressed satisfaction with the communication and cooperation they have received from the Government, most notably with the Government Commission on Relations with Religious Communities, chaired by a Deputy Prime Minister under the former government and currently by the Minister of Culture.

An agreement between the Catholic Church and the state-run Croatian State Radio and Television (HRT) provides regular, extensive coverage of Catholic events (as many as 10 hours per month). Other religious communities receive approximately 10 minutes broadcast time per month or less. The Catholic Church operates one of the country's private national radio stations, Catholic Radio, which is financed by private contributions. The Jewish community reports no restrictions on religious broadcasting. Topics of interest to major non-Catholic religious groups are covered regularly on weekly religious programming on HRT. In April, representatives of minority religious communities met with HRT to discuss the timing and content of religious programming and agreed on broad principles for media presentation of minority faiths. 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 holidays. 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.

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, many ethnic Serbs who wish to return to Croatia, including Serbian Orthodox clergy, continue to encounter difficulties recovering their prewar property and reconstructing damaged 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 30 clergy have returned, leading to a total of approximately 60 Serbian Orthodox clergy in the country by May. 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 often open and severe 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 one offered in public schools. Schools that meet the necessary quota of seven students of a minority faith per class offered separate religion classes 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. However, local authorities in Knin have successfully resisted efforts to establish Serbian Orthodox religion classes for the approximately 500 primary and secondary school children who would be eligible to attend. Similar resistance by local authorities to establishing Serbian Orthodox religion classes in schools has been reported in Imotski and other Dalmatian towns. Serbian Orthodox officials report that due to intimidation, many school children and their parents are reluctant to identify themselves as Serbian Orthodox.

There has been almost no textbook or curriculum reform since the independence of Croatia 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 Croatia. In early 2004, the Government and the Jewish Community cooperated on two different training sessions for teachers and school officials on human rights, tolerance, and the Holocaust. On January 27, schools for the first time recognized Holocaust Remembrance Day with seminars and other events.

The secondary school operated by the Islamic Community for religious training is at full capacity (100 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. Given the lack of trained teachers and the fact that the small Islamic community is relatively dispersed throughout the country, the Islamic community is considering introducing religious

education at the kindergarten level only at the mosque in Zagreb. Authorities representing the Islamic community reported good cooperation and dialogue with the Government on issues of religion and education.

Restitution of property nationalized or confiscated by the Yugoslav Communist regime remains a problem. Major religious communities, including the Catholic Church, 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 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 April 2003, the 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. However, as of May, Catholic Church officials reported that only a couple of properties have been returned over the last year, and in total only 15 to 16 percent of all Church properties have been returned.

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-Catholic religious groups. The Serbian Orthodox community has filed several requests for the return of seized properties, and a few cases involving buildings in urban centers such as Zagreb and Rijeka have been resolved successfully. However, 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 only 10 percent of all property has been returned and that progress has halted in the past year. In addition, religious artifacts and historical items belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church that were taken by Croatian authorities from churches and monasteries during the war have not been returned.

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 World War II Jasenovac concentration camp, site of a memorial and museum, was damaged severely during the 1991–95 conflict and renovation remained ongoing. The Jewish community of Osijek reports some progress on the return of property in Osijek and Vukovar; in particular, part of the property on which the former synagogue of Vukovar stood is in the final stages of return.

In May 2003, local authorities in Rijeka approved the design for a mosque that the Muslim community has been trying to build since 1982. 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 report a supportive attitude on the part of local authorities, but construction has been delayed due to problems with the design and architectural team.

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.

Persecution 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. In Dalmatia, Serbian Orthodox officials reported numerous incidents of verbal threats and physical attacks against clergy and property. Serbian Orthodox officials complain that local police seldom take action against alleged perpetrators, even when they are well known in the community. In September 2003, verbal abuse was directed against the Metropolitan and another member of the Serbian Orthodox clergy.

In two separate incidents in September 2003, windows were broken at the Serbian Orthodox Church in Ogulin. The church is located across the street from the police station, and local police were described as uncooperative. Also in September 2003 in Kistanje, vandals punctured the tires and attempted to set on fire a car belonging to the local Serbian Orthodox priest. In November 2003, a Serbian Orthodox cemetery in the Gospic region was vandalized in what appeared by international observers to be a coordinated effort by multiple perpetrators.

The tombstones at a Serbian Orthodox cemetery in Vukovar, where many who fought in the 1991–1995 conflict are buried, is regularly vandalized and desecrated. Also in Vukovar, the Serbian Orthodox Church of St. Petka was subjected to several attacks during the year. Church windows were broken and damaged, money and relics were stolen, and doors and walls were desecrated with fascist "Ustasha" symbols. In March, a Serbian Orthodox cross marking the sight of a future church and parish house in Borovo Naselje was cut down and demolished. In the week before Easter in April, several monuments at the Serbian Orthodox cemetery in Vinkovci were damaged and desecrated with fascist "Ustasha" symbols. Serbian Orthodox leaders report that in Knin the Church of St. Pokrov is frequently desecrated with fascist "Ustasha" symbols.

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.

Relations between the Government and the Jewish community have steadily improved over the past several years. In July 2003, Israeli President Moshe Katsav visited the country for 3 days on an official visit. Since the election of a new Government in November 2003, the Minister of Science, Education, and Sport, Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Israel; the Foreign Minister laid a wreath at the Yad Vashem memorial center in March. In April, Vladimir Seks, President of the Parliament, gave the keynote address at a commemoration ceremony at the Jasenovac concentration camp that was attended by government officials and leaders of ethnic and religious minority communities. 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 part would significantly affect the community's financial well-being.

Conservative elements within the Catholic hierarchy have expressed dissatisfaction with government policies on war legacy issues, including refugee return and reintegration, cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia, and concern for citizens indicted for war crimes. For example, in April during a parliamentary committee discussion about Bosnian Croat settlers who are illegally occupying houses owned by ethnic Serbs even though they possess alternative accommodation, the Catholic Church representative on the committee implied that the Government should not endeavor to correct the situation because Bosnian Croats were helping with the "demographic renewal" of the country. The statement was neither retracted nor denied, and its implications, which received significant press coverage, were widely perceived as unhelpful to the process of return of refugees and interethnic reconciliation.

In addition, the Catholic Church exercises considerable influence over the Government's social policies. For example, after the Catholic Church protested that the Government's effort to make yoga classes available to teachers as a health and stress reduction benefit was an attempt to introduce Buddhist practices in primary schools under the guise of exercise, participation fell by 50 percent. Similarly, school participation dropped from 100 to 60 percent in an internationally supported government education and prevention program on HIV/AIDS after the Croatian Conference of Bishops (HBK) and Catholic associations protested in January that the program, a small part of which covers the use of condoms, was "unacceptable" and "against Christian ethics." 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; however, the Constitutional Court overturned the law in April after major retailers appealed the law citing financial

losses. The entire initiative was viewed by many elements of civil society as an inappropriate effort by the Catholic Church to impose conservative values on society.

Since Cardinal Josip Bozanic took office as Archbishop of Zagreb in 1997 and became head of the HBK, the Catholic Church leadership has sought a more proactive role in advocating reconciliation. In a June 2003 visit to the country, Pope John Paul II met with members of the Serbian Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic communities and called for ethnic reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Catholic Radio conducts a monthly program on ecumenism that invites speakers from other religious communities. 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.

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 meet frequently at all levels with representatives of religious communities and are engaged in the promotion of human rights, including the religious rights of these groups. The Embassy plays a leading role among diplomatic missions on issues of ethnic and religious reconciliation, and human rights.

CYPRUS

The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. 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. However, the politically divisive environment on Cyprus occasionally affected aspects of religious freedom.

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. After the Turkish Cypriot authorities' decision to relax crossing restrictions on April 23, 2003, Greek Cypriots reported relatively easy access to religious sites in the north, including Apostolos Andreas monastery; Turkish Cypriots equally were able to visit religious sites, including Hala Sultan Tekke mosque, in the government-controlled area. On May 25, the Turkish Cypriot authorities stopped requiring Greek Cypriots to show their passports at checkpoints, further facilitating movement across the buffer zone.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in Cypriot society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a few reports of vandalism of unused religious sites.

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 a total area of 3,571 square miles, and its population is estimated at 814,700. (This is the Government's estimate for the total number of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots living in both parts of the island. The number does not include Turkish settlers or Turkish military personnel residing in the northern part of the island.)

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 ruled by a Turkish Cypriot administration. In 1983, that administration proclaimed itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) although no country recognizes it besides Turkey. A buffer zone patrolled by the UNFICYP separates the two parts. On April 23, 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, although there were reports that slow processing at buffer zone checkpoints limited the number of people who crossed the zone to visit religious sites during holidays.

Approximately 96 percent of the population in the government-controlled area is Greek Orthodox. Approximately 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 Cypriot Protestants and foreigners of various religious beliefs.

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.

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. The basic law in the Turkish Cypriot community also 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 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 Constitution states the Vakf, 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. Both the Greek Orthodox Church and the Vakf are exempt from taxes with regard to religious activity. According to law, they are required to pay taxes only on strictly commercial activities, such as commercial and real estate operations.

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 and the Vakf, for government subsidies to their religious institutions. No other religious group is recognized in the Constitution.

Both the Government of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot administration have 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.

In the government-controlled area, 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 stating the purpose of the nonprofit organization and providing 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 period covered by this report.

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 from such instruction. While these children are exempted from attending religious services, some Jehovah's Witnesses parents have reported that their children were not excused from all religious instruction.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported some difficulties in claiming conscientious objector status and exemption from required reserve military service in the Greek Cypriot National Guard. While the law provides for exemption from active military service for conscientious objectors, it does not provide such an exemption from reserve duty. 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 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 Day.

In the northern part of the island, the Turkish Cypriot basic law refers specifically to a "secular republic," and provides for religious freedom; no specific religion is recognized in the basic law.

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, Birthday of the Prophet Mohammad, and Ramazan Bairam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In May 2001, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Government of Turkey was responsible for restrictions imposed on Greek Cypriots resident in the north in regard to their access to places of worship and participation in other areas of religious life. Developments in April 2003 have permitted relatively unimpeded contact between the two communities and access to respective religious sites.

Between 1997 and 2000, the Government and the Turkish Cypriot authorities agreed to allow reciprocal visits to religious sites on certain religious holidays in which groups of Greek Cypriots visited Apostolos Andreas monastery in the north and groups of Turkish Cypriots visited Hala Sultan Tekke mosque in the south. After April 23, 2003, Greek Cypriots have reported relatively easy access to Apostolos Andreas monastery and other religious sites in the north, while Turkish Cypriots have visited religious sites, including Hala Sultan Tekke in the government-controlled area. Some Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots reported that slow processing at buffer zone checkpoints limited the number of people who can travel across the buffer zone to visit religious sites during holidays. As of December 31, 2003, there had been almost 2.5 million crossings of the buffer zone in both directions. Two additional checkpoints have been opened to facilitate the flow of personal vehicles across the buffer zone.

Greek Cypriots and Maronites are still prohibited from visiting religious sites located in military zones in the Turkish Cypriot community.

There have been reports that Greek Cypriot Orthodox and Maronite priests have occasionally performed religious services in unused churches in the north. These events have not generated any media coverage or reaction from Turkish Cypriot authorities.

Missionaries have the legal right to proselytize in both communities, but the Government and Turkish Cypriot authorities closely monitor missionary activities. 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.

In both the government-controlled areas and the Turkish Cypriot community, there were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

In both the government-controlled areas and the Turkish Cypriot community, 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 persecution targeted at specific religions, including act of anti-Semitism, by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are polite relations between the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus and the other religious communities in the south. 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 continued to be robbed and vandalized. Although Turkish Cypriots reported that unused mosques in the south also have been vandalized, the Government routinely carried out maintenance and repair of mosques in the south.

The Orthodox Church is suspicious of any attempts to proselytize among Greek Cypriots and closely monitors such activities. Religion is a significantly more prominent component of Greek Cypriot society than of Turkish Cypriot society, with correspondingly greater cultural and political influence. This influence is long-standing. 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 preeminent position of the Church has been somewhat reduced in recent years, it remains an important power center in Cypriot politics. Present day influence of the Church can be seen in the political messages bishops and priests regularly include in their Sunday sermons.

On April 24, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots voted in separate referenda on a plan to reunite the island proposed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. In the weeks leading up to the referendum vote in the Greek Cypriot community, the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus came out against the Annan Plan and priests and bishops regularly made political statements about the Annan plan in their sermons. In a sermon six days before the referendum, the Bishop of Kyrenia (now resident in the government-controlled area, although his traditional seat is located in the area under Turkish Cypriot administration) told Greek Cypriots that those who voted for the Annan plan would not go to heaven. In the Turkish Cypriot community, the Vakf did not take a public stand on the Annan plan.

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. Similarly, the Vakf is the largest landowner in the north.

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 of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Embassy played a key role, working closely with the U.N., in obtaining agreement from both sides in January 2000 to initiate a project to restore the island's two most significant religious sites, the Apostolos Andreas monastery and the Hala Sultan Tekke mosque. Restoration work at the sites began in 2001 based on recommendations from the world's leading experts in structures of this type and period. Both sites were cleaned, fenced, and re-landscaped. The ancillary buildings at both sites were also renovated, and work on the church and mosque buildings was scheduled to begin in the fall of 2002. An unexpected Neolithic archeological find at Hala Sultan Tekke mosque has delayed work on the mosque while the find is being documented. Once this process is complete, the restoration project will be tendered. Despite agreement between the Government of Cyprus and the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus on the particulars of the Apostolos Andreas restoration project, some Greek Cypriots oppose the plan to remove some relatively recent construction on top of the monastery in order to enable experts to best preserve the historic structure underneath. Pressure from those opposing the official restoration plan has resulted in suspension of work at the monastery.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officers meet periodically with Greek Cypriot and 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 a total area of 30,442 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10.2 million. The country has a largely homogenous population with a dominant Christian tradition. However, primarily as a result of 40 years of Communist rule between 1948 and 1989, the vast majority of the citizens do not identify themselves as members of any organized religion. In a 2001 opinion poll, 38 percent of respondents claimed to believe in God, while 52 percent identified themselves as atheists. Nearly half of those responding agreed that churches were beneficial to society. 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 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, although Islam has not been registered as an officially recognized religion since the Communist takeover in 1948. 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 due to its recognition by the State before 1989.

Missionaries of various religious groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and members of 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 Culture are eligible to receive subsidies from the State, although some decline state financial support as a matter of principle and as an expression of their independence. There are 25 state-recognized religious organizations. In March, the Center of Muslim Communities applied for registration; in April, the Jewish Center Chai also applied for registration.

In March, after consultations with the Czech Bishops' Conference, the Ministry denied the application of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church based on insufficient supporting signatures. Of the 357 signatures received, 48 failed to provide all of the required information and 22 were those of nonmembers. The Conference determined that the organization was not properly constituted according to canonical law. The organization is not affiliated with its namesake in Ukraine. An appeal by the Unification Church to overturn its denial to register in 1999 remained pending before the Constitutional Court.

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 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. 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 at 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 1991, such as the small Jewish community, are not required to meet these conditions for registration. Unregistered religious groups, such as the small Muslim minority, 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, approval, 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 to 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 over 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 responsive. 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 those 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 from June through December 2001. At the end of the period covered by this report, the fund had distributed $3.9 million (100 million Czech crowns) dedicated to individual claims, as well as approximately $974,000 (25 million Czech crowns) dedicated to social grants.

Certain property of religious orders, including 175 monasteries and other institutions, was 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 farmland and woodland that are now in the hands of municipal governments or private owners. The 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 432,250 acres of land and some 700 buildings to the Catholic Church. Efforts to re-

solve 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 Day, and St. Stephen's Day (December 26) are recognized as national holidays, though they do not negatively impact 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. In October 2003, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Ministry of Culture improperly interpreted the registration law in failing to register a religious enterprise operated by the Catholic Church in the North Moravian town of Lipnik nad Becvou. The Ministry argued that the charity was operating nursing facilities and that the registration law did not provide for establishment and maintenance of medical facilities. The Court ruled that the Ministry of Culture did not have the right to deny the registration of religious charities. The Catholic Church reports 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 increased 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 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 targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvement and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In May 2002, the Parliament passed a measure to extend the deadline for filing art restitution claims for Holocaust victims by four years, which subsequently was signed into law by the President. The deadline had been set for December 31, 2002, but was extended until December 31, 2006.

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.

In February, the city council in the northern Moravian town of Orlova refused to approve a privately funded proposal to build a mosque in the city. Muslim leaders were not familiar with the petitioning organization, the Islamic Union, and expressed doubt that the community in question had a sufficient need for the $7.8 million (200 million crown) project.

In April, a 4,500-signature petition was filed in the northern Bohemian town of Teplice seeking to block the construction of a 1,467 square-foot mosque. The town's construction permit office must respond to the building request by the end of July.

A small but persistent and fairly well-organized extreme rightwing 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. On October 21, 2003, unknown vandals damaged gravestones at the Jewish cemetery in Turnov in eastern Bohemia. On November 8, 2003, police in the northern Bohemian town of Krupka apprehended two youths painting Nazi symbols on a monument to the victims of a World War II death march. On November 9, 2003, an unknown vandal upturned 15 tombstones of Jewish girls who died in a Nazi concentration camp at Trutnov in eastern Bohemia. On January 30, police arrested Denis Gerasimov, member of the Russian Neo-Nazi band Kolovkrat, and charged him with supporting and propagating a movement aimed at suppressing human rights. Gerasimov was detained at Prague's Ruzyne International Airport after police found large amounts of Nazi propaganda in his luggage. His case was pending at the end of the period covered in this report.

On January 28, a Prague municipal court sentenced Michal Zitko to 3 years in prison on charges of supporting and propagating a movement aimed at suppressing human rights for publishing a Czech-language edition of Mein Kampf in 2000.

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. 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.

Through its Support for East European Democracy grant program, the Embassy assisted two nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting religious freedom and understanding. The first grant of $5,000 (128,370 Czech crowns) assisted an NGO devoted to cultivating religious tolerance through public discussions in Prague and regional cities. The second grant of $7,447 (191,194 Czech crowns) provided support to an NGO devoted to raising public awareness of multiculturalism for intercultural workshops that included components on religious diversity, called "Religions of the World," for eight regional primary schools.

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 NGOs. 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 2002, 84.3 percent of the population belonged to the official Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although only about 3 percent of the

church members attend services regularly, most church members utilize the church for weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, and religious holidays.

The second largest religious community is Muslim, constituting approximately 3 percent of the population (170,000 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 communities. Approximately 5.4 percent of the population is not religious, and approximately 1.5 percent is atheist.

Missionaries operate within the country, including representatives of the Mormons and members of 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 November, 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.

There is an official state religion. The Constitution stipulates that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the national church, the reigning monarch shall be a member of it, 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 subsidy; 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. According to a poll conducted in the fall of 2003, 63 percent of citizens feel that the Evangelical Lutheran Church should have a special place in the Constitution, down from 68 percent in 1999.

Eleven Christian holidays are considered national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Christmas Day 2. 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 March, 12 religious organizations were recognized by royal decree, including: The Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and Russian Orthodox churches as well as Judaism, and 92 were approved, including several Islamic groups, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christian Orthodox, Hindu, Baha'i, and Hara Krishna. 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.

Guidelines, published in 1999, for approval of religious organizations established the following for religious organizations: a written text of the religion's central traditions, descriptions of its most important rituals, an organizational structure accessible for 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 1970s 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 the Scientologists they must first submit an application before the Ministry can provide any feedback. Despite the Scientologist's unofficial status, the church maintains its European headquarters in Copenhagen.

There are no restrictions on proselytizing or missionary work so 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. Under Section 76 of the Constitution, the rights of parents to home school or educate their children in private schools are protected.

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. One bill, being debated by the Parliament, is the so-called "Imam Law." If approved, the law would require religious leaders to be self-supporting, speak Danish, and respect "Western values" such as democracy and the equality of women to be approved to perform marriage ceremonies and keep their residency permits. Although it would affect all religious faiths, it is widely acknowledged to be aimed at preventing radical Islamic clerics from immigrating to the country, living off the welfare system, and inciting Muslims to reject Western culture and values. The Government, the Government's far-right ally, the Danish People's Party, as well as the largest opposition party, the Social Democrats, backed the proposal. However, much of the religious community was against the proposed changes. Two religious umbrella organizations, the Danish Mission Council (with 34 member organizations) and the Danish Churches' Consultation (with 11 member organizations), which together represent such groups as the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Baptists, Anglicans, Methodists and Catholics, criticized the proposal as a violation of religious freedom. The bill had not been voted on at the time of publication.

The Ministry for Refugees, Immigrants, and Integration also considered 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 said 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, 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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

The problems the Muslim community encountered in building the first Muslim cemetery in the country appeared to be resolved during the period covered by this report. In 2001, the Broendby municipality decided to buy the piece of land chosen for the cemetery from the Copenhagen municipality. Broendby estimated the land was worth about $161,000 (1 million Danish kroner). Municipal authorities believed it was worth about $3.5 million (21.5 million Danish kroner). A commission was established to determine the value, but for 2 years was unable to come to an agreement. In May the case was referred to an appraisal commission, which in June declared the value of the land to be approximately $323,000 (2 million kroner). After a meeting of the Copenhagen City Council economic committee, Lord Mayor Jens Kramer Mikkelsen announced that the land owned in Broendby would be sold to the Broendby municipal government for an expected sum of approximately $323,000 (2 million kroner). The land is expected to be resold to the Danish-Islamic Cemetary Fund for the same amount. A number of Christian cemeteries all around the country have set aside special sections for Muslim burials; however, conditions in these did not meet all of the Islamic religious requirements.

The Muslim community also attempted to identify a site and funding for the construction of a mosque in the country at the end of the period covered by this report. Financing, location and other issues remained unresolved within the Muslim community.

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 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 has resulted in some tension between Muslims and the rest of the population. Minority group unemployment tends 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.

There were isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, primarily by immigrants. Most involved vandalism, such as graffiti on a synagogue's walls, or nonviolent verbal assaults, such as young men of an Arab background shouting at a rabbi. 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.

In May, the Justice Minister was under pressure from several parties in Parliament (the Christian Democrats, Social Liberals, Social Democrats, and Danish People's Party) to outlaw the Danish branch of the international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir for extremist behavior, including alledgedly issuing threats and recruiting school children. In October 2002, the spokesman for the Danish branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir was sentenced to a 60-day probation for distributing pamphlets calling for the murder of all Jews. The Justice Minister said she would not rule out a ban but had no legal justification to take action. The political parties encouraged her to use a section of the Constitution that allows the Government to temporarily ban an organization while it simultaneously refers the case to the courts to determine whether the group can be legally banned for violence or inciting violence. The issue had not been resolved 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. It also reaches out to immigrant communities on broader issues. For example, the U.S. Ambassador has met with religious and community leaders from Middle Eastern and Turkish backgrounds on religious and cultural diversity, democracy and freedom, Muslim life in the United States, and condolences over terrorist acts. The Department of State has also sponsored Muslim citizens for international visitors programs. Embassy officers maintain contact with some key religious minority groups and representatives.

In addition, the U.S. Embassy has supported a number of programs to combat anti-Semitism, such as sponsorship of a documentary film on the saving of the Jewish victims during World War II, facilitation of the nomination of Denmark for the Lyndon B. Johnson Moral Courage Award for the country's actions to save Jewish persons in WWII, and coordination of Holocaust education policy.

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 in the context of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 17,666 square miles and a population of 1.36 million (65 percent ethnic Estonian and 35 percent Russian-speaking). The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) was the largest denomination, with 165 congregations and approximately 180,000 members. The Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC) had 59 congregations with approximately 20,000 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 minority faiths had fewer than 6,000 adherents. According to population census in 2000, approximately 70,000 persons considered themselves atheists.

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. A few new churches have been built and inaugurated in recent years, including a Methodist church in Tallinn and an Orthodox church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, in Narva. Church attendance, which had seen a surge coinciding with the independence movement in the early 1990s, now has decreased significantly. Anecdotal evidence from local Lutheran churches indicates a 76 percent decrease in registered confirmations between 1990 and 2000.

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. The Churches and Congregations Act decrees that the commanding officer of each military unit shall ensure conscripts the opportunity to practice their religion. Military chaplain services extend to service members of all faiths. The coordination of chaplains' services to the prisons is delegated to one of the Lutheran diaconal centers, and the center carries out this responsibility in a way that does not discriminate against non-Lutherans.

There are other laws and regulations that directly or indirectly regulate individual and collective freedom of religion. The 1993 law on churches and religious organizations requires that all religious organizations have at least 12 members and register with the Religious Affairs Department under the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MIA). Leaders of religious organizations must be citizens with at least 5 years' residence in the country. The minutes of the constitutive meeting, a copy of statutes, and a notarized copy of three founders' signatures serve as supporting documents to the registration application.

The Estonian Orthodox Church is registered as subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP), which ended a series of disputes over the registration of the name "the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church." In 1993, the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC)—independent since 1919, subordinate to Constantinople since 1923, and exiled under the Soviet occupation—reregistered under its 1935 statute. A group of ethnic Russian and Estonian parishes that preferred to remain under the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church structure imposed during the Soviet occupation attempted, unsuccessfully, to claim the EAOC name.

A program of basic Christian ecumenical religious instruction was available in public schools. In primary school, parents decided whether their children would participate in these religious studies; at the secondary level, pupils decided if they would attend these classes. 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 property restitution process largely has been completed. The specific details of EOCMP registration have significant implications for which branch of the Orthodox Church may receive legal title to church property. By the end of the period covered by this report, most church properties, including those being used by the

EOCMP, were under the legal control of the EAOC. Once the EOCMP registered and acquired the legal status of a "juridical person," it then obtained the right to initiate court proceedings to gain de jure control over the properties that it had been using on a de facto basis with the permission of the EAOC. In 2002, the Government and the two churches concluded a protocol of intentions according to which the EAOC would transfer a part of its property presently used by the EOCMP to the State. The State in turn will lease it to the EOCMP for 50 years. The Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Alexy II, visited the country in September 2003 to mark the registration of the EOCMP. Despite continued political progress, differences over the disposition of Orthodox Church property continued between the EAOC and the EOCMP. The Government approved the transfer of three properties to the EOCMP in 2003, including properties in Haapsalu, Tartu and Tapa. Aleksander Nevski Cathedral is owned by the city of Tallinn and rented out to its Russian Orthodox congregation on a several decade lease basis.

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 day, 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 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 is generally amicable. Although the majority of citizens were nominally Lutheran, ecumenical services during national days, Christian holidays, or at public events was common.

Most of the religious adherents among the country's Russian-speaking population were Orthodox, while the Estonian majority is predominantly Lutheran. There is a deep-seated tradition of tolerance of other denominations and religions.

President Ruutel awarded the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church Alexy II with the highest Estonian civilian order, the Terra Mariana Cross, 1st Class. Alexy II recognized Ruutel for his outstanding contribution to the strengthening of the unity of Orthodox nations.

Two churches and three graveyards were vandalized during the period covered by this report. In July 2003, candlesticks were stolen from a Narva church, and a stained glass window was broken in a Viljandi church. In November 2003, a tombstone and part of a fence were broken in a Rakvere cemetery. In April, eight graves were vandalized in Tartu Raadi cemetery. Authorities initiated misdemeanor proceedings in the 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 is comprised of digital photos and detailed descriptions, is shared with law enforcement agencies as needed.

In June 2003, three skinheads were sentenced to conditional imprisonment for activities that publicly incited hatred on the basis of national origin and race. They were convicted for having drawn swastikas and written inscriptions insulting to Jewish persons on buildings in the northeastern Estonian town of Sillamae.

There are two pending investigations related to the posting of anti-Semitic remarks on the Internet.

In 1998, President Meri established the International Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, headed by Finnish diplomat Max Jakobson. In 2001, the Commission produced a nine-page document about the Holocaust in Estonia. A fuller report has been in progress for several years, and the Commission is continuing its work.

Other steps taken by the Government to promote tolerance include introduction of an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day, first commemorated on January 27, 2003. The Government has stated that it will focus on educating teachers and lec-

turers by compiling a best practices handbook, as well as organizing forums and seminars.

The Government has stated that it plans to begin sensitivity training for law enforcement officials so that they can more effectively act against manifestations of intolerance, xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism.

Estonia is an observer to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education. In that capacity, it is working with Sweden to encourage nongovernmental organization (NGO) Holocaust education efforts. A seminar for Estonian school teachers, developed by an Estonian NGO in cooperation with Sweden's Living History Forum (to be co-financed by the Estonian Ministry of Education), has been proposed for August 2004.

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. Officials of the U.S. Embassy met regularly during the period covered by this report with appropriate government agencies, NGOs, and a wide range of figures in religious circles. In 2002 and 2003, U.S. Embassy officials engaged the Government and nongovernmental actors to promote dialogue and education on Holocaust issues in the country.

In September 2003, the U.S. Delegation of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research visited the country. It met with high-level officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science, an Executive Secretary of Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, as well as representatives of NGOs, such as Friends of Israel and Jaan Tonisson Institute. It identified opportunities to strengthen the Task Force's activity.

During the period covered by this report the U.S. government also funded the following projects: Publication of the following books: "Who are the Jews and What is the Holocaust?"; "Tell Your Children" about Holocaust history; and Virtual Exhibition in the Harju County Museum—History of Jews and Holocaust.

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 a total area of 130,127 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.2 million. Approximately 84.1 percent are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and one percent belongs to the Orthodox Church. The new Religious Freedom Act that took effect on August 1, 2003, which facilitated procedures for leaving the Lutheran Church, may account for the increase in number of persons leaving the Church during the reporting period. It was reported in February that 26,857 persons left the Lutheran Church, which is nearly 11,000 more than in 2002. Adding to the loss, the number of new members was a few hundred below the previous corresponding figure.

An additional 1 percent belongs to the Pentecostal Church. Various other nonstate religions have approximately 44,000 members. In the past decade, the number of Muslims has grown from 1,000 to approximately 20,000; many of them are immigrants. The largest single group is Somalis, but the community also includes North Africans, Bosnians, peninsula Arabs, Tartars, Turks, Iraqis, and others. Today, there are close to 20 registered Muslim mosques or religious communities. Approximately 10 percent of the population does not belong to any religious group.

Active members of the state Lutheran Church attend services regularly, participate in small church group activities, and vote in parish elections. However, the majority of church members are only nominal members of the state church and do not participate actively. Their participation occurs mainly during occasions such as holi-

days, weddings, and funerals. The Lutheran Church estimates that approximately 2 percent of its members attend church services weekly, and 10 percent monthly. The average number of church visits per year by church members is approximately two. In March the Lutheran Church conducted a study among its employees regarding their religious commitment, which showed that 10 percent of the interviewed were either weakly or not at all committed to the church doctrines. Nonetheless, as many as 70 percent of the rest were strongly committed. The Lutheran Archbishop was satisfied with the results.

Nontraditional religious groups freely profess and propagate. Mormons have been active in the country for decades. Other groups include the Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

A Gallup poll conducted in October showed that citizens hold more positive views of Christian churches and religious groups than in the past. Over one half of the interviewed citizens believed that one is accountable for one's deeds in the afterlife. Seventy-seven percent hold a positive view of the Lutheran Church, 65 percent of the Salvation Army, and 62 percent of the Orthodox Church. However, over 60 percent of citizens hold negative views about Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Only 10 percent of citizens hold a favorable opinion of Islam, although this percentage increased since past polls. The same poll also found that opinions toward Judaism had intensified. Many respondents previously had selected the 'no opinion' option in previous polls when asked about Judaism; however, this most recent poll indicated that both positive and negative attitudes toward Judaism had grown.

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 one of these state churches pay a church tax 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 that church. The church taxes are used to defray the costs of running the state churches. State churches also handle services such as recording births, deaths, and marriages. Official state registrars handle these services for citizens outside these churches. 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.

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 communities as religious groups.

The new Religious Freedom Act, which was passed in February 2003 and took effect on August 1, 2003, also includes regulations on registered religious communities. Their autonomy was increased, and the law on associations is applied to them extensively. 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 1-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 law also replaced the concept of confessional religious instruction in primary and secondary schools is replaced by instruction in an individual's personal faith. A pupil has the right to obtain instruction in his or her personal faith and is responsible for attending classes in it. Teachers in Evangelical Lutheran Orthodox schools no longer must be members of a particular church.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion. Various government programs available through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor focus on reducing discrimination, including discrimination based on religion. The programs focus on studies, research, integration programs, and recommendations for further incorporation of immigrants into society. 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. An application by Wicca practitioners to become an officially recognized reli-

gious community was denied during the reporting period; the Wiccans have appealed this decision.

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 due to the tendency to regard religion as a private matter.

Nontraditional religious groups practice their religions freely. They are generally free from discrimination despite the negative views some citizens hold about their faiths.

Immigrants do not encounter difficulties in practicing their faiths; however, they sometimes encounter random incidents of racism or xenophobia in civil society. An issue raising a fair amount of discussion among the clergy is whether registered couples of the same sex should be given the blessings of the Church. The annual meeting of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 2003 decided to table two opposite proposals: one banning access to Church offices for those living in a same-sex relationship registered with civil authorities, and the other supporting Church blessings for such couples. No decision had been made because of the controversy involved.

The state churches often speak out in support of the national/Nordic welfare state model, couching social welfare state values in religious or moral terms. Speaking at the opening of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in May, the Bishop of Espoo expressed his position on the Kyoto Climate agreement, encouraging the Government not to withdraw from it because of short-term national interests. A senior politician of the Green Party, one of the country's major political parties, concentrating on environmental and human rights related issues, 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.

The country has a small, assimilated Jewish community. It is the policy of the Jewish Community to document incidents of anti-Semitism and ask prosecuting authorities to prosecute them. During the first half of the year, according to the Jewish community, a case involving the publication and distribution of anti-Semitic material resulted in a conviction. Many citizens are critical of Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories, and support for the Palestinians is strong; this sometimes leads to rhetoric that some observers believe skirts the line between legitimate criticism and anti-Semitism. There is also concern about offensive political caricatures or cartoons in some 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.

In the spring, the Embassy hosted two roundtables on the assimilation and integration into society of Muslim immigrants and refugees. The roundtables attracted a diverse group of immigrants to the country, including participants from Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Afghanistan, Ghana, Turkey, and Bangladesh. Participants discussed the challenges of maintaining their unique cultural and religious identities while simultaneously becoming full and active members of their new homeland. Because of the success of these roundtable discussions, the Embassy plans to continue to host periodically meetings of leaders and activists in the country's Muslim community.

In June, the Embassy partnered with the Government and STETE, a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), to cosponsor a conference on anti-Semitism in Europe at the Parliament. The Embassy facilitated the participation of Deidre Berger of the American-Jewish Committee of Berlin. The conference featured remarks by the country's Minister for Justice, Johannes Koskinen, as well as presentations by European diplomats, the country's Jewish community, NGOs, and the

media. The Embassy also hosted earlier in 2004 a visit by the State Department's Deputy Director in the Office of Holocaust Issues. He met with governmental officials at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry for Social Affairs, and Ministry for Education, and secured the government's participation for the first time in the Holocaust Task Force's annual plenary session in June.

In May, the Embassy organized a voluntary visitor program to the United States for officials to discuss ways to combat trafficking-in-persons; a representative from the Lutheran Church participated in the program. The Embassy is working with the Lutheran Church to develop proactive measures in areas such as victim assistance as part of a coordinated approach to stopping regional trafficking of women and girls.

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. A 1905 law on the separation of religion and State prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

Although Parliament passed, at the Government's request, a law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools by employees and students, government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. There were a few improvements in the Government's response to anti-Semitic attacks. 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. After an initial decline in the number of anti-Semitic incidents early in the reporting period, there was an increase in the number of incidents from January to June. 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 a total area of 211,209 square miles, and its population is approximately 60 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. Asked about religious faith in a 2003 poll, 54 percent of those polled identified themselves as "faithful," 33 percent as atheist, 14 percent as agnostic, and 26 percent as "indifferent." The vast majority of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, but according to one member of the Catholic hierarchy, only 8 percent of the population are practicing Catholics. Muslims constitute the second largest religious group, with approximately 4 to 5 million adherents, or approximately 7 to 8 percent of the population. Protestants make up 2 percent of the population, and the Jewish and Buddhist faiths each represent 1 percent, with 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 persons and is divided among Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox groups. According to press reports, up to 60 percent of the Jewish community celebrates at most only the High Holy Days, such as Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. One Jewish community leader has reported that the largest number of practicing Jewish persons in the country is Orthodox.

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 Churches.

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 due to increased participation by African and Antillean immigrants. According to the press, there are approximately 31,000 declared 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 violent conflict between religious groups 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 holidays.

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 cultuelles" (associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes) and "associations culturelles" (cultural associations, which are 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, runs strictly religious activities through its association of worship and operates a school under its cultural association.

Under the 1905 statute, religious groups must apply with the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and 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 receiving 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 (Protestant), and Roman Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace-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 3-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, the Government passed legislation that will prohibit public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, the Jewish skullcap, and large crosses;

the legislation is scheduled to take effect during the 2004–2005 school year. 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 antidefamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. 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 January 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. The Government regularly applies this law 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 Vatican initiated a series of meetings focusing on administrative and judicial matters.

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, comprises the Jewish "cultuelle" 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 stated purpose is to fight anti-Semitism, affirm its solidarity with Israel and commitment to finding a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict, and preserve the memory of the Holocaust.

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.

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

The Government moved to restrict the wearing of "religious symbols" in public schools. From July until December 2003, an inter-ministerial commission created by President Jacques Chirac led a public debate about secularism, integration, and the place of religion in the country. Many of the hearings and publications associated with the debate focused on whether the wearing of the Muslim headscarf by public school students was compatible with secularism and gender equality. In the past, various courts and government bodies have considered, on a case-by-case basis, whether denying Muslim girls and women the right to wear headscarves in public schools constitutes a violation of the right to religious freedom.

In February, on the recommendation of the inter-ministerial commission, the Government introduced a law to prohibit the wearing of "conspicuous" religious symbols—including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps, and large crosses—by employees and students in public schools. The law was passed in March and is expected to enter into force in September. Implementing regulations, finalized in May, provide for the display of "discreet religious symbols," and grant considerable discretion to individual schools to interpret and implement the law. Items of clothing such as bandannas and turbans can be allowed in schools if such items are worn as fashion accessories without religious significance. Students will not be permitted to seek exemptions on religious grounds to school dress codes. Some Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments voiced concerns about the law's potential to restrict religious freedom.

There were at least five cases when school authorities took action to prevent women and girls from wearing Muslim headscarves in public schools. In October 2003, a school disciplinary board in Aubervilliers voted to expel two female students

for wearing the Muslim headscarf in school. The decision was reversed in January; however, the girls chose to be home-schooled rather than return to the public school. In a separate case in November 2003, a school disciplinary board in Haute-Rhine expelled a female student for wearing a headscarf; in April, after a hearing at the Council of State, the student was allowed to return to school on the condition that she wear a small bandanna instead of a large headscarf. In December 2003, a disciplinary board in Paris suspended a teacher's aide for wearing a headscarf while working in a public school.

A court decision remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report regarding a civil servant who filed a lawsuit after being disciplined in 2002 for wearing a Muslim headscarf at work. Some Muslim groups have protested the government policy prohibiting the wearing of the headscarf in national identity photos. In September 2003, a court in Lyon ruled in favor of a young woman who sought reinstatement and $6,100 (5,131 euros) in damages and interest after she was fired by a telemarketing firm for refusing to wear her headscarf in a manner deemed appropriate by her employer, who stated her opposition to headscarves. The telemarketing firm appealed, and the next hearing is scheduled to take place later in 2004.

Due to concerns about terrorism, between July 2003 and April, the Government moved to expel 12 Muslim clerics whose sermons were determined to have threatened public order by calling for jihad (holy war). In April, two Muslim clerics were deported from the country. Later that month, however, a court ruled one such expulsion illegal, and the cleric has since returned to the country. As a result, the Minister of Interior and the President stated their intention to change the law to prevent radical Islamic clerics from recruiting terrorists and preaching misogynistic treatment of women in the country. At the end of the reporting period, the draft law, which declares that a foreigner can be deported for publicly proclaiming deliberate and explicit acts of provocation proposing discrimination, hatred, or violence against any specific person or group of persons, had been passed by the National Assembly and awaited a July 15 Senate vote.

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 1996, 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 due to the ensuing publicity.

In 1998, the Government created the "Inter-ministerial Mission in the Fight against Sects/Cults" (MILS) to analyze the "phenomenon of cults." The president of MILS resigned in 2002 under criticism; later that year, on the advice of an interministerial working group, the Government established the MIVILUDES, the successor to MILS. In January, MIVILUDES reported that the Ministry of Interior ordered the establishment of regional "vigilance units" in each department that must meet at least once a year. The report stated that MIVILUDES had received many reports of dangerous activity; the largest number of complaints concerned the refusal by members of the Jehovah's Witnesses to accept blood transfusions.

Some observers remained concerned about the 2001 About-Picard law. 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; however, its provisions for the dissolution of groups had not been applied.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination, frivolous lawsuits, and prosecution for allegedly fraudulent activity. In October 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, the police intelligence agency, Renseignements Generaux (RG), was instructed by the Administrative Tribunal of Paris to comply with a July 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 2002, the Versailles Court of Appeals upheld a Nanterre court's 2000 decision that the French Association of Jehovah's Wit-

nesses, a cultural association, must pay more than $55.8 million (40 million euros) in back taxes. The plaintiffs' appeal of the decision to the Court of Cassation remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

In December 2003, the European Court of Human Rights condemned the Government for discrimination against a member of Jehovah's Witness who was denied custody of her children by the Appellate Court of Nimes, which cited concerns about her religious affiliation in its decision. The ECHR awarded the plaintiff $12,200 (10,000 euros) damages and $720 (590 euros) for expenses; she has the right to appeal the custody decision in domestic courts.

On January 24, police detained 38 members of the Falun Gong faith for several hours during the state visit of the Chinese president.

In April, police arrested three educators believed to be members of the Sukyo Mahikari, a Japanese "cult," for "abusing the weakness" of children in Ardennes.

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

In late 2003, the Ministry of Education created a national commission to combat anti-Semitism in schools. In March, the Government published a teaching tool on the country's values, intended to help public school teachers promote tolerance and combat anti-Semitism and racism. The limited amount of time in which these educational tools have been available to teachers makes it difficult to judge their efficacy.

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 announcing in June the creation of a department-level Council of Religions that will raise public awareness of increased racial and antisectarian incidents.

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 (Conseil des Eglises Chretiens en 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 discuss and issue statements on various national and international themes.

There was a troubling increase in the number of anti-Semitic incidents during the second half of the reporting period. A Ministry of Interior report indicates, without specifying criteria, that there were 135 anti-Semitic "acts" in the first 6 months of 2004, compared with 127 for all of 2003. The Ministry of Interior also reported that 76 individuals had been arrested for committing anti-Semitic acts in the first 4 months of 2004. By contrast, the Minister of Justice recently reported that, between January 1 and June 6, there were 180 acts of anti-Semitism in the country, consisting of 104 attacks against property, 46 attacks against people, and 30 press infractions. In 35 of these cases, 61 individuals had been identified and pursued by the justice system.

In 2003, according to the Ministry of Interior's revised figures, police recorded 466 anti-Semitic threats and 127 violent attacks. Investigators were able to determine that, of the 127 violent actions reported in 2003, 6 cases involved elements of the extreme right and 44 cases involved delinquent youths from "tough neighborhoods." The Government reported that in 2003, police had sufficient evidence to question 91 suspects, arrest 69, and bring to trial 43. In 2003, there were seven convictions for anti-Semitic attacks committed that year and 15 convictions for attacks committed in 2002; punishments ranged from fines to 4-year prison sentences.

The Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in the country (CRIF) operated a hotline to register allegations of threats in the greater Paris region; from January to April, it received 97 reported threats and attacks, all of which were verified. According to the CRIF's website, 320 anti-Semitic incidents were reported during 2003.

The CRIF stated in the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (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 2003, the NCCHR released an extensive analysis of anti-Semitic incidents reported by the police. There have been no reported deaths due to anti-Semitic violence since 1995, but 21 persons were injured in anti-Semitic attacks in 2003. Based on investigations of the attacks, the NCCHR stated its conclusions that disaffected French-North African youths were responsible for many of the incidents, which officials linked to tensions in Israel and the Palestinian territories. A small number of incidents were also attributed to extreme-right and extreme-left organizations. In May, the Minister of Interior commented that the increase in attacks this year "marked a resurgence—notably among some youths—of neo-Nazi ideology fed by hatred and ignorance."

In its report on anti-Semitic attacks in 2003, the NCCHR focused on an increase in the proportion of anti-Semitic incidents that took place in schools. In 2003, 22 of 125 attacks (18 percent) and 73 of 463 threats (16 percent) occurred in schools; the report shows this to be the highest proportion of incidents in schools since 1997, the oldest data in the report. The report stated, "The number of threats testifies most particularly to the persistence of tensions, notably through the language of adolescents and children for whom [anti-Semitic] insults seem to be banal . . . This 'banalization' of uncivil acts, often provocative, and the aggressive behavior of certain children, notably in the so-called sensitive neighborhoods, accentuate incomprehension and rejection." Some Jewish groups were outraged when a court ordered that—in the case of two 11-year-old Muslim youths expelled for accusations of physical and verbal attacks against a Jewish student—the two students be readmitted to school, and also ordered the Government to reimburse the families $1,220 (1,000 euros) each for court costs. The courts found that, while the behavior of the Muslim students merited action, the age of the students and the circumstances did not justify expulsion.

In June, an individual shouting "Allah Akbar" stabbed a Jewish student and assaulted two other Jewish students in the city of Epinay-sur-Seine. This same person is believed to be responsible for similar knife attacks on five other victims, including those of Haitian and Algerian origin. A suspect, reportedly identified by several of the victims, was in custody at the end of the period covered by this report. The varied and random nature of the victims made the true motive of the attacks hard to discern.

On June 11, an American citizen studying at the Yeshiva of Vincennes was assaulted. Although the student himself did not describe this incident to the U.S. Embassy as an anti-Semitic attack, a Jewish organization subsequently contacted the Embassy to report it as such. Embassy officers met with the representative of the organization to discuss anti-Semitism in general and the case of the American citizen in particular.

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. In 2002, the Marseille prefecture instituted 24-hour patrols at all of the city's Jewish sites. In addition, the Ministry of Interior has earmarked $18.3 million (15 million euros) for additional security at Jewish sites.

In November 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 December 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.

Members of the Arab/Muslim community experienced incidents of harassment and vandalism. According to the NCCHR, 29 of 36 violent racist attacks and 105 out of 137 racist threats in 2003 were directed at the North African (largely Muslim) population. Government figures from a Ministry of Interior report covering the first half of 2004 vary slightly but also indicate an upsurge in racist violence and threats: 256 incidents from January through June, as compared to 232 for all of 2003. In the first 3 months of 2004, 12 Muslim prayer halls were attacked. In late June, a group of Neo-Nazis desecrated 48 graves of Muslim soldiers in the Alsace region of eastern

France with swastikas and "SS" inscriptions. That incident followed shortly after several other graffiti attacks on Muslim, Jewish, and Christian sites in the region.

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 April, the Court of Appeals of Douai fined a mayor approximately $610 (500 euros) for racial discrimination for refusing to marry Muslims on Saturday afternoons, which he reserved for Christian marriages.

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. Embassy officers also meet regularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved in the issue. American Members of Congress and Congressional Commissions, as well as Congressional staff members, also have discussed religious freedom issues with senior government officials.

In June, senior U.S. Government representatives from Congress and the Departments of State and Justice worked closely with the country's officials to ensure a successful conference in Paris to study the link between racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic Internet sites and hate crime. The conference generated significant press interest and set the stage for further conferences on the subject.

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.

In November 2003, a transfer of power took place as the result of peaceful protests referred to as the "Rose Revolution." President Eduard Shevardnadze stepped down, and in January 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili from the National Movement was elected President.

After November 2003, the status of religious freedom improved. Attacks on religious minorities, including violence, seizure of religious literature, and disruption of services and meetings decreased. At times, local police and security officials failed to protect nontraditional religious minority groups. Although police at times failed to respond to continued attacks by Orthodox extremists against members of Jehovah's Witnesses and other nontraditional religious minorities, authorities arrested excommunicated Orthodox priest Father Basil Mkalavishvili in March.

Citizens generally do not interfere with traditional religious groups, such as Orthodox, Muslim, or Jewish; however, there is widespread suspicion of nontraditional religious groups. Although there were incidents in which Orthodox extremists harassed and attacked such groups, especially members of Jehovah's Witnesses, there were fewer incidents during the period covered by this report. Reputable and repeated public opinion polls indicated that a majority of citizens believe minority religious groups (nontraditional groups) are detrimental for the state and that prohibition and outright violence against such groups is acceptable to limit their growth.

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 officers of the Embassy repeatedly raised U.S. concerns about the status of nontraditional religious groups, and the harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with former President Shevardnadze and President Mikheil Saakashvili, senior government officials, and Members of Parliament (M.P.s).

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 25,900 square miles and its population is approximately 4.4 million. Most ethnic Georgians (more than 70 percent of the population, according to the results of the 2002 census) nominally associate themselves with the Georgian Orthodox Church. Orthodox churches serving other non-Georgian ethnic groups, such as Russians, Armenians, and Greeks, are subordi-

nate to the Georgian Orthodox Church. 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, the majority of whom have all left the country. Under Soviet rule, the number of active churches and priests declined sharply and religious education was nearly nonexistent. Membership in the Georgian Orthodox Church 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, Ilya 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. A large number of Armenians live in the southern Javakheti region, where they constitute a majority of the population.

Islam is prevalent among Azerbaijani and northern Caucasus ethnic communities in the eastern part of the country and also is found in the regions of Ajara and Abkhazia. Approximately 9.9 percent of the population is nominally Muslim. There are three main Muslim populations: Ethnic Azeris (who constitute the second largest ethnic minority), ethnic Georgian Muslims of Ajara, and ethnic Chechen Kists. There are four madrassas (Muslim religious schools) attached to mosques in eastern Georgia, three of which are Shi'a and connected to Iran, and one of which is Sunni and connected to Turkey.

Judaism, which has been present since ancient times, is practiced in a number of communities throughout the country, particularly in the largest cities of Tbilisi and Kutaisi.

Approximately 8,000 Jewish persons remain in the country, following 2 large waves of emigration: the first in the early 1970s and the second in the period of perestroyka during the late 1980s. Before then, Jewish officials estimate there were as many as 100,000 Jewish persons in the country. There also are small numbers of Lutheran worshipers, mostly among descendents of German communities that first settled in the country several hundred years ago. A small number of Kurdish Yezidis have lived in the country for centuries.

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); Seventh-day Adventists (local representatives state that there are approximately 350 members); Pentecostals (both Georgian and Russian, estimated at approximately 9,000 adherents); members of 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 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) has not yet sent missionaries to the country, and the number of Mormons in the country is very small. There also are a few Baha'is and Hare Krishnas. Except for Jehovah's Witnesses, membership numbers on these groups are generally not available; however, the membership of all these groups combined is most likely fewer than 100,000 persons.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the central Government generally respects this right in practice; however, local officials, police, and 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 (referred to as the Concordat) was signed and ratified by Parliament in October 2002. The Concordat recognizes the special role of the Georgian Orthodox Church and devolves authority over all religious matters to it, including matters outside the Church.

The law is silent on registration of religious communities. There is no mechanism by which religious organizations can register. While the law does not proscribe unregistered organizations from performing sacramental rituals, there is also no protection for organizations that do. Because unregistered organizations are not recognized as legal entities, they may not rent office space or import literature, among other activities. Individual members of unregistered organizations may engage in these activities as individuals, but in such cases are exposed to personal legal liability. Religious groups that perform humanitarian services may be registered as charitable organizations, although religious and other organizations may perform human-

itarian services without registration. On November 28, 2003, the Ministry of Justice registered the organization Watchtower as an affiliate branch of the foreign organization Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Watchtower is a legal organization in use by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In March, a working group comprised of members of various traditional and nontraditional religious groups, representatives from the Ministry of Justice, and officials from the Council of Europe (COE) met in Strasbourg to discuss a draft bill on religion submitted to Parliament in 2001. The working group decided that such a law on religion was not necessary, and discussed drafting amendments to laws already in place, such as the provision in the civil code that allows groups to officially register. On June 11, a working group attended a conference in Tbilisi sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and COE to discuss the establishment of a legal status for religious groups. The conference included representatives from all religions and foreign legal experts. All parties agreed that drafting separate laws was unnecessary and that making two to three amendments to current laws would suffice. Participants from all sides also decided that a representative from all religions should be involved in a transparent drafting process, which had up until that time been closed. At the end of the reporting period, parliamentary reaction to such amendments was uncertain. It was possible that another conference might be held, with mediation by OSCE at the Public Defenders later in 2004.

The President, the National Security Council Secretary, and the Government Ombudsman have been effective advocates for religious freedom and have made numerous public speeches and appearances in support of minority religious groups. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and Procuracy in isolated instances have become more active in the protection of religious freedom but until the transfer of power which occurred in November 2003, failed to pursue criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their continued 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 Georgian Orthodox Church 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. As a result of policies regarding religion initiated by the Soviet government in the late 1980s, the present Patriarch began at that time 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.)

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Georgian Orthodox Church 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. A 2002 Constitutional Agreement between the Church and the State defines relations between the two. The Concordat contained several controversial articles, including Article 6.6 which gives the Georgian Orthodox Church approval authority over all religious literature and construction; transfer to Georgian Orthodox Church ownership of church treasures expropriated during the Soviet period and held in state museums and repositories; government compensation to the Georgian Orthodox Church for moral and material damage inflicted by the Soviet authorities; and government assistance in establishing Orthodox chaplaincies in the military and in prisons. The 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 Article 6.6 was not in the original. Representatives of nontraditional religious minority groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals, were not included in the Concordat process. The Catholic Church has 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, intimidation, and the use of force by ultra-conservative Orthodox extremists whom the Government has at times failed to control. On several occasions during the reporting period, local police and security officials harassed non-Orthodox religious groups, particularly local and foreign missionaries, including members of Jehovah's

Witnesses, Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Hare Krishnas. Some nationalist politicians used the issue of the supremacy of the Georgian Orthodox Church in their platforms and criticized some Protestant groups, particularly evangelical groups, as subversive. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses in particular were the targets of attacks from such politicians, most prominently Former M.P. Guram Sharadze. The situation has improved substantially since November 2003, and the arrest of Father Basil Mkalavishvili has sent a helpful signal.

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 of the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses 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 Georgian Orthodox Church. 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 the 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.

On April 5, members of Jehovah's Witnesses filed an application to build a place of worship on land they own in Telavi. On April 15, the case went to court and the local authorities never appeared. Jehovah's Witnesses refiled the application on May 21 and were denied the right to build because, according the local authorities, the neighbors do not like them. At the end of the reporting period, the group planned to file a complaint with the central government to bring the issue to the attention of the national authorities. The group has also experienced similar obstacles in Samtredia, where they have a Kingdom Hall, and local authorities have refused to give them permission to use the building.

Customs and police officials sometimes seized literature of nontraditional religions, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses. On October 10, Tbilisi Airport Customs seized a shipment of religious literature they imported. However, since January, they claimed they have not had any problems receiving literature from abroad.

Forum 18 reported that some nontraditional religious organizations claim that importing religious literature can be difficult or expensive. There were reports that the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church wrote a letter to the Customs Service saying that the distribution of foreign literature should be banned. However, a representative for the Patriarch maintains that the Patriarch only objects to large quantities of non-Orthodox literature being imported.

The Ministry of Education requires that all students in the fourth grade take a "Religion and Culture" class in addition to history courses. Although the course is supposed to cover the history of other major religions aside from Georgian Orthodoxy, the Ministry of Education has received many complaints from parents of students whose teachers concentrate only on the Georgian Orthodox Church during the course.

The Georgian Orthodox Church 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 has no veto power.

The Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches have been unable to secure the return of their churches and other facilities closed during the Soviet period, many of which later were given to the Georgian Orthodox Church by the State. A prominent Armenian Church in Tbilisi remained closed, and 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 Georgian Orthodox Church.

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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On occasion, local police and security officials continued to deny protection to or harass nontraditional religious minority groups, particularly members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The police sporadically intervened to protect such minorities from attacks by Orthodox extremists. Police participation or facilitation of attacks diminished during the reporting period. The Catholic Church continued to face difficulties in attempting to build churches in the towns of Kutaisi and Akhaltsikhe. During

the reporting period, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and Procuracy have not pursued aggressively criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their attacks against religious minorities.

Since 1999, followers of excommunicated Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili (Basilists) have engaged in numerous violent attacks on nontraditional religious minorities, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and especially members of Jehovah's Witnesses. From July to November 2003, the Basilists, as well as members of another Orthodox extremist group called "Jvari" (Cross), continued their series of attacks, at times together. The attacks involved seizing religious literature, preventing and breaking up religious gatherings, and beating parishioners, in some cases with nail-studded sticks and clubs. The attacks have been publicized widely, in part by the Basilists themselves who videotaped some incidents. Many acts of religious violence have gone unpunished, despite the filing of more than 750 criminal complaints. On November 4, 2003, several members of the "Jvari" movement received sentences for their participation in violence against Jehovah's Witnesses. "Jvari's" leader, Paata Bluashvili, and two of his colleagues were given 4-year suspended jail sentences, while two other colleagues received suspended 2-year jail sentences. In April, they appealed the decision to the district court, which reduced their sentences by half.

During the reporting period, there were numerous attacks on members of nontraditional religions, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses. At times, supporters of Mkalavishvili and former M.P. Sharadze threatened and physically abused members at meetings for worship, prevented such meetings, and destroyed religious literature and property, such as the private homes where the meetings often took place. During the period covered by this report, Basilists continued to harass several families of Jehovah's Witnesses, demanding that they stop holding meetings in their homes. Because of the continuing violence, Jehovah's Witnesses have refrained from public meetings in favor of gatherings in private homes. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses regularly filed complaints with the General Prosecutor and Ombudsman, but authorities rarely investigated the perpetrators.

On July 8, 2003 in Abasha, the Mayor and approximately ten other persons reportedly entered the house of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, Valeri Tsomaia, to disband a religious meeting; they physically and verbally abused several worshippers.

For 6 weeks ending on July 13, 2003, protestors blockaded a home in Tbilisi to prevent Russian-speaking Pentecostals from attending worship services in a private home. Police restrained the protestors from using violence, but did not allow the worshippers to enter their building. Officially the protestors stated that the worship building is in a residential area and the services are too noisy; however, during the protests, they stated that they wanted to prevent non-Orthodox services from taking place.

After an arrest warrant was issued for defrocked radical Orthodox priest Basili Mkalavishvili in June 2003, he went into hiding for 4 months, and subsequently reportedly suffered a heart attack in October 2003. After his release from the hospital, although his whereabouts were commonly known, police made no effort to arrest him. On March 11, Mkalavishvili gave a press conference at the Ombudsman's office accusing the Government of protecting sects and undermining Orthodoxy. Later that night, police surrounded his "church," where several hundred "parishioners" were present, and launched an early morning assault on March 12. Authorities were criticized for using excessive force, including ramming a truck into the building, using tear gas, and beating Basili "parishioners" with batons when they attempted to prevent Mkalavishvili's arrest. Police arrested Mkalavashivili and several of his most aggressive supporters. Ten persons were treated for injuries sustained during the arrest. Mkalavishivili remains in pretrial detention. He is being charged with illegal interference in religious rite, damaging property, causing mass disorder, and resistance, threat, or violence against protector of public order. The case has been submitted to the Vake-Saburtalo district court, and Mkalavishvili will be tried as soon as a judge and prosecutor have been selected.

An investigation into the June 2003 arson of a Baptist Church in Akhalsopheli remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Regular and reliable information regarding the separatist controlled "Republic of Abkhazia," which no country recognizes and over which the Government does not exercise authority, is difficult to obtain. A 1995 decree by the Abkhaz "President" Vladislav Ardzinba that banned Jehovah's Witnesses in Abkhazia remains in effect. Although Baptists, Lutherans and Catholics report they are allowed to operate in Abkhazia, the Georgian Orthodox Church reports they are unable to operate there.

The Patriarch has expressed concern over the Russian Orthodox Church's support of separatism in the region by subsidizing Web sites that encourage successionist

sentiments. The Georgian Orthodox Church has also complained that in addition to encouraging separatism, the Moscow Theological Seminary is training Abkhaz priests. The Patriarchy claims that the Russian Orthodox Church is sending in priests under the pretext of setting up Abkhaz churches, despite the fact that it recognizes the country's territorial integrity.

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

In September 2003, approximately 3,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses attended a congress in Zugdidi without any incidents. Also, in March, approximately 2,500 members of Jehovah's Witnesses attended a congress in Kutaisi. In previous years, radical Orthodox Christians threatened such congresses.

In November 2003, Paata Bluashvili and four others received suspended jail sentences for their roles in violent attacks on minorities, including an incident in May 2003 when they allegedly raided an apartment where a Pentecostal congregation was meeting. Bluashvili and one other Jvari follower received 4-year suspended sentences, and the other three received 2-year suspended sentences. In April, the guilty appealed the decision to the district court, which reduced their sentences by half. The case is now over.

On November 28, 2003, the Ministry of Justice registered the organization Watchtower as an affiliate branch of the foreign organization Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Since November 2003, members of Jehovah's Witnesses have been able to rent property and operate as an affiliate of Watchtower Inc.

On March 12, authorities arrested defrocked radical Orthodox priest Basili Mkalavishvili at his "church" in Tbilisi, on a arrest warrant for his pretrial detention issues in June 2003. On March 15, Mkalavishvili and six of his supporters were sentenced to 3 months of pretrial detention on charges of resisting arrest and interfering with law enforcement officers. Mkalavishvili and another follower are additionally being charged with illegal interference in religious worship, destruction of property, and creating mass disorder. The remaining five are only being charged with resisting arrest. The cases have been submitted to the Vake-Saburtalo district court and are set to go to trial in the near future.

On March 12, Poti customs cleared a shipment of religious literature imported by Jehovah's Witnesses that had been received in the country the previous day.

On April 18, 2003, the Isani-Samgori Circuit Tax Inspection issued a letter annulling the tax identification code of the Union of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Representation of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. The group petitioned the court to invalidate the administrative act of the tax bureau. On May 18, Isani-Samgori Circuit Tax Inspection signed an act of reconciliation canceling the administrative change, in exchange for which the Watchtower Society would not seek repayment of damages caused by the annulment. This agreement means that Jehovah's Witnesses will maintain their tax registration and will be able to freely import religious literature.

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 Georgian Orthodoxy and Georgian ethnic and national identity is strong.

Relations between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are very good. Since the fall of 1996, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims 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.

In April, Muslims and Lutherans united to build a sports stadium in the Dmanisi District, although by the end of the reporting period, the stadium had not yet opened.

The Jewish communities report that they have encountered few societal problems. There is no historical pattern of anti-Semitism in the country, nor were there any reported incidents during the period covered by this report.

The Patriarch and several ranking clergy of the Georgian Orthodox Church attended an interfaith reception in honor of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America on April 19. In attendance were representatives of the Armenian Church; the Roman Catholic Church; the Baptist, Muslim, and Jewish communities; and other religious communities, including "nontraditional" sects.

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. Some members of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the public, including former M.P. Sharadze, 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 February survey conducted by a reputable polling organization, 81 percent responded that members of Jehovah's Witnesses create serious problems for Georgian society.

Nationalistic politicians manipulated reports of the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in order to create public hostility however, religious leaders of different faiths have spoken out against such criticism.

The Georgian Orthodox Church withdrew its membership from the World Council of Churches in 1997 in order to appease clerics strongly opposed to ecumenism. The Patriarchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church has strongly criticized the attacks perpetrated by Orthodox extremists against nontraditional religious minorities and has distanced itself from Mkalavishvili. However, some Georgian Orthodox Church officials have had ties to the Jvari organization, which has committed numerous acts of violence against religious minorities. Following the June 2003 destruction of the Baptist Church in Akhalsopheli, the Orthodox Bishop in Rustavi contacted the Baptist Bishop to say he had withdrawn his support of the Jvari organization. The Orthodox Bishop had been one of the founders of Jvari.

During the year, there were several incidents of violence and harassment directed towards nontraditional religious groups, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses. In August and September 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. On October 13, 2003 in Senaki, approximately 40 persons reportedly verbally and physically assaulted several members of 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 Ombusdman, authorities began a preliminary investigation, which ended soon after when they decided not to initiate a case.

Many of the problems among traditional religious groups stem from disputes over property. 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 Georgian Orthodox Church by the State. A prominent Armenian church in Tbilisi remains closed and 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 Georgian Orthodox Church. Georgian Orthodox Church authorities have accused Armenian believers of purposely altering some existing Georgian churches so that they would be mistaken for Armenian churches. The Catholic Church successfully completed the construction of a new church in Batumi in 2000.

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 the country's 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.

On October 8, 2003, the Ambassador attended the opening of a Pentecostal Assemblies of God Mission building in Tbilisi.

In April 2004, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith reception for the visiting Orthodox Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada Her-

man, attended by Georgian governmental officials, NGOs and representatives from a wide-range of religious communities.

GERMANY

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, discrimination against minority religious groups 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 generally free practice of religion. The Government does not recognize Scientology as a religion, viewing it instead as an economic enterprise; federal and state classification of Scientology as a potential threat to democratic order has led to employment and commercial discrimination against Scientologists in both the public and private sectors. A federal court upheld states' right to ban the wearing of Muslim headscarves by teachers in public schools, and two states passed legislation in the period covered by this report to prohibit public school teachers from wearing Muslim headscarves.

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of minority religions, including Scientologists, reported an improving climate of tolerance. However, senior government officials continued to refuse to enter into direct dialogue with the Church of Scientology. The Lutheran Church as well as the state governments of Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg, and Hamburg continued their information campaign against Scientology and other alleged "cults." These actions contributed to persistent negative public attitudes toward members of minority religions.

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 a total 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 the organizations themselves give an approximate breakdown of the membership of the country's denominations. The Evangelical Church, which includes the Lutheran, Uniate, and Reformed Protestant Churches, has 27 million members, who constitute 33 percent of the population. Statistical offices in the Evangelical Church estimate that 1.1 million members (4 percent of the membership) attend weekly religious services. The Catholic Church has a membership of 27.2 million, or 33.4 percent of the population. According to the Church's statistics, 4.8 million Catholics (17.5 percent of the membership) actively participate in weekly services. According to government estimates, there are approximately 3.1 to 3.5 million Muslims living in the country (approximately 3.4 percent to 3.9 percent of the population). Statistics on mosque attendance were not available.

Orthodox churches have approximately 1.1 million members, or 1.3 percent of the population. The Greek Orthodox Church is the largest, with approximately 450,000 members; the Romanian Orthodox Church has 300,000 members; and the Serbian Orthodox Church has 200,000 members. The Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate has 50,000 members, while the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad has approximately 28,000 members. The Syrian Orthodox Church has 37,000 members, and the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church has an estimated 35,000 members.

Other Christian churches have approximately 1 million members, or 1.2 percent of the population. These include Adventists with 35,000 members, the Apostolate of Jesus Christ with 18,000 members, the Apostolate of Judah with 2,800 members, the Apostolic Community with 8,000 members, Baptists with 87,000 members, the Christian Congregation with 12,000 members, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) with 39,000 members, the Evangelical Brotherhood with 7,200 members, Jehovah's Witnesses with 165,000 members, Mennonites with 6,500 members, Methodists with 66,000 members, the New Apostolic Church with 430,000 members, Old Catholics with 25,000 members, the Salvation Army with 2,000 members, Seventh-day Adventists with 53,000 members, the Union of Free Evangelical Churches with 30,500 members, the Union of Free Pentecostal Communities with 16,000 members, the Temple Society with 250 members, and the Quakers with 335 members.

Jewish congregations have approximately 87,500 members and make up 0.l percent of the population. According to press reports, the country's Jewish population is growing rapidly; more than 100,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union 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 numbers and the number of congregation members.

The Unification Church has approximately 850 members; the Church of Scientology has 6,000 members; Hare Krishna has 5,000 members; the Johannish Church has 3,500 members; the International Grail Movement has 2,300 members; Ananda Marga has 3,000 members; and Sri Chinmoy has 300 members.

Approximately 21.8 million persons, or 26.6 percent 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 minority religious groups remains an issue.

Religion and State are separate, although historically a special partnership exists between the State and those religious communities that have the status of a "corporation under public law." If they fulfill certain requirements, including assurance of permanence, size of the organization, and no indication that the organization is not loyal to the State, religious organizations may request that they be granted "public law corporation" status, which among other things entitles them to levy taxes on their members that the State collects. Organizations pay a fee to the Government for this service, and not all public law corporations avail themselves of this privilege. The decision to grant public law corporation status is made at the state level. Many religious groups have been granted public law corporation status. Among them are the Lutheran and Catholic Churches, as well as the Jewish community, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists, Christian Scientists, and the Salvation Army.

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 1938 and throughout the Nazi period. Repairs to and restoration of some Christian churches and monasteries are undertaken with state financial support because of the expropriation by the State of church lands in 1803 during the Napoleonic period. Having taken from the churches the means by which they earned money to repair their buildings, the State recognized an obligation to cover the cost of those repairs. Subsidies are paid out only to those buildings affected by the 1803 Napoleonic reforms. 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.

According to the "State Agreement on Cooperation" signed by the Government and the Central Council of Jews, approximately $3,396,300 (3 million euros) will be provided annually to the Central Council of Jews, which in turn will provide the Government with an annual report on the use of the funds. The agreement emphasizes that the Central Council of Jews is open to all branches of Judaism. Since the agreement was ratified, a conflict has developed between the Central Council, which is Orthodox in orientation, and the World Union for Progressive Judaism, because the Central Council refused to disburse funds to any institutions other than Orthodox Jewish institutions. Political leaders, including Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Interior Minister Otto Schily, used their offices to mediate this ongoing dispute.

Religious organizations are not required to register. Most religious organizations are registered and treated as nonprofit associations, which enjoy tax-exempt status. State-level authorities review registration submissions and routinely grant tax-exempt status. Organizations must register at a local or municipal court and 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. On January 27, 2003, the Federal Office for Finances granted the Church of Scientology an exemption from taxes on license fees paid to U.S.-based Church of Scientology organizations for copyrighted materials, based on a decision by the Cologne Court issued on October 2002; the court based its decision on the double-taxation agreement between the Government and the U.S.

Most public schools offer religious instruction in cooperation with the Protestant and Catholic churches and offer instruction in Judaism if enough students express interest. A nonreligious ethics course or study hall generally is available for stu-

dents not wishing to participate in religious instruction. The issue of Islamic education in public schools has become topical in several states. In 2000 the Federal Administrative Court upheld previous court rulings that the Berlin Islamic Federation qualified as a religious community and as a result must be given the opportunity to provide religious instruction in Berlin schools. The decision drew criticism from the many Islamic organizations not represented by the Berlin Islamic Federation, and the Berlin State Government expressed its concerns about the Islamic Federation's alleged links to Milli Gorus, a Turkish group classified as extremist by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC). However, after another court decision in favor of the Islamic Federation in 2001, Berlin school authorities decided to allow the Islamic Federation to begin teaching Islamic religious classes in several Berlin schools starting in September 2001. The classes have subsequently caused little controversy. Bavaria announced in 2000 that it intended to offer German-language Islamic education in its public schools starting in 2003. In the beginning of the 2003–2004 school year, they began a trial phase of Islamic education at a public school in Erlangen. State-wide Islamic education is not possible, as the Education Ministry has no legitimate partner representing Muslims in Bavaria with which it can deal. Bavaria, in cooperation with Turkey, has offered "Islamic religious instruction" in its public schools since the eighties, and since 2001, this subject has been offered in both Turkish and German.

The Berlin Buddhist Society offered Buddhist religious education in public schools. Under Berlin's public education system, 90 percent of the cost of approved religious education, as well as provision of facilities, is publicly funded.

The right to provide religious chaplaincies in the military, in hospitals, and in prisons is not dependent on the public law corporation status of a religious community. The Ministry of Defense was considering the possibility of Islamic clergymen providing religious services in the military, although none of the many Islamic communities has the status of a corporation under public law.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The Federal Interior Ministry continued its immigration exclusion (refusal to issue a visitor visa) against the founder of the Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, and his wife, Hak Ja Har Moon. The couple have been refused entry to the country (and through Schengen Treaty visa ineligibility, to other Schengen countries as well) since 1995, when the Chief Office for Border Security issued a notice of refusal of entry for an initial period of 3 years. The Government refused entry based on its characterization of Reverend Moon and his wife as leaders of a "cult" that endangers the personal and social development of young persons. Citing this original justification, the Government extended its refusal of entry for another 2 years in August 2002 and was the only Schengen country to do so. The Unification Church asserts that Reverend and Mrs. Moon's personal presence at certain ceremonies is a crucial part of the Church's doctrine and has sought legal remedies to the refusal of entry. However, federal courts have ruled that the exclusion does not infringe upon church members' freedom to practice their religion.

The Higher Federal Administrative Court had not yet decided an appeal by members of Jehovah's Witnesses to overturn the Berlin State Government's decision to deny them public law corporation status. A Federal Administrative Court in Berlin concluded that the group did not offer the "indispensable loyalty" toward the democratic state "essential for lasting cooperation" because it forbade its members from participating in public elections. The group does enjoy the basic tax-exempt status afforded to most religious organizations.

The Church of Scientology, which operates 18 churches and missions, remained under scrutiny by both federal and state officials, who contend that its ideology is opposed to the democratic constitutional order. Since 1997 Scientology has been under observation by the federal and state OPCs. In observing an organization, OPC officials seek to collect information, mostly from written materials and firsthand accounts, to assess whether a "threat" exists. More intrusive methods would be subject to legal checks and would require evidence of involvement in treasonous or terrorist activity. Federal OPC authorities stated that no requests had been made to employ more intrusive methods, nor were any such requests expected.

Within the federal system, the states showed large differences with respect to their treatment of the Church of Scientology. Two states, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, did not monitor Scientology, stating that Scientology does not have an actively aggressive attitude toward the Constitution, the condition required by the states' laws to permit OPC observation. The city-state of Berlin dropped OPC observation of Scientology in September 2003, and the states of Hesse

and North Rhine-Westphalia did not mention Scientology in their 2003 OPC reports. However, Bavaria announced in November 2002 that it may seek to ban Scientology based on recommendations of a report and indicated that it would ask the Federal Interior Ministry to consider a federal ban. Bavaria has cited medical malpractice associated with Scientology's "auditing" techniques as one possible basis for the ban. At a convention of state interior ministers in March 2003, Bavaria found no support among other states, except for Hamburg and Baden-Wuerttemberg, for the idea of a ban against Scientology.

Other organizations under OPC observation are right-wing extremist, left-wing extremist, or foreign extremist and terrorist groups; Scientology is the only religious community under OPC observation, and Scientologists contend that inclusion in the list of totalitarian and terrorist groups is harmful to the Church's reputation. The federal OPC's annual report for 2002 concluded that the original reasons for initiating observation of Scientology in 1997 remained valid but noted that Scientology had not been involved in any criminal activity.

During the period covered by this report, a state university in Saxony threatened one of its prominent German university professors with termination if he did not desist from publicly condemning official government discrimination against Scientology. The professor, who is not a Scientologist himself, has been the subject of intense personal criticism by Saxon government officials and by academic colleagues.

Several states have published pamphlets detailing the ideology and practices of minority religions. States defend the practice by noting their responsibility to respond to citizens' requests for information about these groups. While many of the pamphlets are factual and relatively unbiased, some groups fear that inclusion in a report covering known dangerous cults or movements could harm their reputations. Scientology is the focus of many such pamphlets, some of which warn of alleged dangers posed by Scientology to the political order and free market economic system and to the mental and financial well being of individuals. The Hamburg OPC published "The Intelligence Service of the Scientology Organization," which outlines its claim that Scientology tried to infiltrate governments, offices, and companies and that the Church spies on its opponents, defames them, and "destroys" them.

Since March 2001, the Government has prohibited firms bidding on government contracts from using the "technology of L. Ron Hubbard" in executing government contracts. Firms owned, managed by, or employing Scientologists could bid on these contracts. The private sector 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. Private sector firms that screen for Scientology affiliations frequently cited OPC observation of Scientology as a justification for discrimination. The Federal Property Office barred the sale of some real estate to Scientologists, noting that the Finance Ministry had urged that such sales be avoided if possible.

Since 1996 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. Scientologists have claimed that the "S" notations violate their right to privacy and interfere with their livelihood.

Scientologists continued to report instances of societal discrimination. For example, Bavaria required applicants for state civil service positions to complete questionnaires detailing any relationship they may have with Scientology. Currently employed civil servants were not required to provide this information. The questionnaire specifically stated that the failure to complete the form would result in the employment application not being considered. However, previous court cases have ruled in favor of employees who have refused. According to Bavarian and federal officials, no one in Bavaria lost a job or was denied employment solely because of association with Scientology; Scientology officials confirmed this. A number of state and local offices shared information on individuals known to be Scientologists. There were numerous reports from Scientologists that they were denied banking services when the account was to be opened under the name of the Church of Scientology, and they were denied the right to rent facilities to hold meetings and seminars.

A July 2002 ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court clarified the Government's "warning" function with respect to nontraditional religions. In a case pending since the 1980s involving the "Bagwan/Osho Spiritual Movement," the Court ruled that the Government is allowed to characterize such nontraditional religions as "sects," "youth religions," and "youth sects" and is allowed to provide accurate information about them to the public; however, the Government is not allowed to defame them by using terms such as "destructive," "pseudo-religion," or "manipulative."

In October 2003, the Federal Constitutional Court overturned a lower court's 2002 decision that without the appropriate state legislation, a school in Baden-Wuerttemberg could prohibit a Muslim teacher from wearing a headscarf to work. The ruling does not affect states' ability to establish a legal basis for banning headscarves in schools. After the ruling, several states indicated their intention to enact laws prohibiting Muslim public servants from wearing headscarves on duty. Several states have submitted draft laws prohibiting Muslim teachers from wearing headscarves on duty in public schools. During the period covered by this report, the states of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg have formally enacted such legislation.

Difficulties sometimes arise between religious groups and the State over tax matters and zoning approval for building places of worship. The state government has repeatedly denied an Islamic organization in Berlin approval to build an Islamic cultural center due to the government's allegation that the organization has ties to the "Muslim Brotherhood" extremist organization. The organization disputes this allegation and insists that it rejects all forms of extremism.

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 continued to contribute to religious freedom.

The country is becoming increasingly secular. Regular attendance at religious services is decreasing. After more than 4 decades of Communist rule, the eastern part of the country had become far more secular than the western part. Representatives of religious groups note that only 5 to 10 percent of eastern inhabitants belong to a religious organization.

Following a rise in the incidence of anti-Semitic crimes and an increase in public criticism of the Israeli Government's actions in the Middle East, Jewish community leaders expressed continuing concern about their perception of a rise in anti-Semitism in the country. In addition, several Jewish groups accused the print media of pro-Palestinian bias in their reporting of the situation in the Middle East and expressed concern that this alleged bias could increase anti-Semitic attitudes. In October, the public remarks of Martin Hohmann, a Christian Democratic Union (CDU) member of Parliament, comparing the actions of Jewish persons during the Russian Revolution to those of the Nazis during the Holocaust, led to the opening of an inquiry following a criminal complaint alleging incitement and slander. The CDU subsequently expelled Hohmann from its parliamentary caucus. During the period covered by this report, Jewish cemeteries were desecrated in Kassel and Beeskow. Dozens of gravestones were pushed over or painted with pro-Nazi graffiti. In September, police arrested several persons for suspected involvement in a plot to bomb Munich's Jewish Center. In early May, the Prosecutor started proceedings against four neo-Nazis from "Kameradschaft Sued" who had planned the bomb attack. The initial indictment reads "membership in a terrorist organization," and the Prosecutor indicated that a second indictment against the head of the group, Martin Wiese and his deputy would follow later in 2004. Recent anti-Semitic incidents indicate that Arab youths are increasingly behind attacks on and harassment of the country's Jewish persons. Authorities strongly condemned the attacks and devoted significant investigative resources to the cases. A synagogue in Duesseldorf that was burned in 2001 remained under around-the-clock police protection.

In April, the Government hosted a historic Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) conference on anti-Semitism. With strong support from the Government, the OSCE conference led to a declaration calling on OSCE member states to implement a set of concrete measures to combat anti-Semitism.

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.

With an estimated 3 million adherents, Islam is the third most commonly practiced religion in the country after Catholicism and Lutheranism. All branches of Islam are represented, with the vast majority of Muslims coming from other countries. At times this has led to societal discord, such as local resistance to the con-

struction of mosques or disagreements over whether Muslims may use loudspeakers in residential neighborhoods to call the faithful to prayer. There also remain areas where the law conflicts with Islamic practices or raises religious freedom issues. On September 3, 2003, a Neo-nazi from Brandenburg was sentenced to 6 years in jail after having thrown Molotov cocktails against a Turkish snack bar; six persons were inside at the time. Reports continued of opposition to the construction of mosques in various communities around the country. The opposition generally centered on issues such as concern about increased traffic and noise that would result from new construction.

The Lutheran 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. The Lutheran sect commissioners are especially active in their efforts to warn the public about supposed dangers posed by Scientology, as well as the Unification Church, Bhagwan-Osho, and Transcendental Meditation. The printed and Internet literature of the sect commissioners portrays 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 are 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."

In the 1990s, three of the country's major political parties—the Christian Democratic Union and its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP)—banned Scientologists from party membership. These bans, which have been challenged unsuccessfully in courts by excluded Scientologists, were still in effect at the end of the period covered by this report.

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.

In response to anti-Semitic crimes, members of the U.S. Embassy closely followed the Government's responses and officially 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 discussions during the period covered by this report. 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 German Church of Scientology requests for direct dialogue with German Government officials. The U.S. Government consistently maintained that only an organization itself can determine whether it is religious.

GREECE

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodoxy) 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. 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 a total 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 throughout the country. With the exception of the Turcophone Muslim community in Thrace, which is accorded official status under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, 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 though other estimates range up to 140,000.) Ethnic Greeks are a sizeable percentage of most Christian non-Orthodox denominations. Aside from the indigenous Muslim minority in Thrace, Muslim immigrants in the rest of the country are estimated at 200,000 to 300,000. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses are estimated at 50,000; Catholics at 50,000; Protestants, including evangelicals, at 30,000; and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) at 300. Scientologists claim 500 active registered members. The long-standing 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 Greek religions claim 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 noncitizen residents are not Greek Orthodox. The largest group is the Albanians (approximately 700,000 including legal and illegal residents); most are nominally Muslim, while others are Orthodox, or Roman Catholic, but the majority are nonpracticing. The Muslim immigrant population in the country continues to grow.

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 and Poland also practice Catholicism. The Bishop of Athens heads the Roman Catholic Holy Synod.

Some religious groups, such as the evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses, consist almost entirely of ethnic Greeks and a few Russian and Albanian immigrants. Other groups, such as Mormons and Anglicans, consist of an approximately equal number of ethnic Greeks and non-Greeks.

The Turcophone Muslim community, concentrated in Thrace with small communities in Rhodes, Kos, and in Athens, is composed mainly of ethnic Turks but also includes Pomaks and Roma. A growing number of Muslim immigrants live in Athens and in rural areas.

Scientologists and followers of the Ancient Greek religions, most of whom are located in the Athens area, practice their faith through registered nonprofit 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 (Greek Orthodoxy) 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.

Additionally, in 2001, the Government added a conscientious objector provision in the Constitution. Also the Government has an effective, well-run Ombudsman's office, which successfully handled an increasing number of cases. 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, these religions cannot own property as religious entities; the property must belong to a specifically created legal entity rather than to the church itself. In practice this places an additional legal and administrative burden on non-Orthodox 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 will or inherit property as a religious entity. The law extended legal recognition as a private entity to 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. 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, and documentation provided by Scientology representatives and the Greek Orthodox Church indicates it does consult with local bishops in some cases. According to the Ministry's officials, applications for additional houses of prayer are numerous and are approved routinely; however, the Scientologists of Greece have not been able to register or build a house of prayer. Followers of the ancient Greek religions applied twice in the last three years for a house of prayer permit but have not received an official response to their applications, despite advice of the Ombudsman to the Ministry of Education and Religions to officially respond to their requests.

Leaders of some non-Orthodox religious groups claimed that all taxes on religious organizations were 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," as well as all officially recognized 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 Treaty of Lausanne provides that the Turcophone Muslim minority has the right to Turkish-language education, with a reciprocal entitlement for the Greek minority in Istanbul (approximately 3,000 persons). Western Thrace has secular Turkish-language bilingual schools and two Koranic schools run by the State. As of 2004, approximately 7,000 Muslim students are enrolled in Turkish bilingual grammar schools and 1,250 attend minority high schools. Another 280 students attend the Islamic schools, many of whom become schoolteachers. The majority of Thrace Muslims, approximately 3,050, 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 every year. Approximately 800 Thrace Muslim students take advantage of this affirmative action program; a small number choose to attend university in Turkey.

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 instruction in Greek as a second language, other than in one multicultural elementary education "pilot school."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 2000, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs 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 philosophical 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 minority churches to court that operate or build places of worship without a permit.

Nikodim Tsarknias, a former Greek Orthodox priest who is now a priest of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, held religious services in Macedonian, the language of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, without a house of prayer permit. In May Tsarknias was sentenced to 3 months in prison by the Aridea Criminal Court of First Instance on charges of establishing and operating a church without authorization. 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 re-

ligions. The non-Greek Orthodox churches 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, difficulties in burying their dead, and local officials' resistance to construction of places of worship (which in most cases was resolved quickly and favorably). 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 foreign Mormons and Greek citizen 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 Treaty and the Treaty of Amsterdam, 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. In addition, the rigorous training requirements for advancement also require a solid educational background and fluency in Greek, an obstacle for some Turcophone Muslims.

Muslim citizens are underrepresented in public sector employment and in state-owned industries and corporations, which many observers claim is due to the education level of the available applicant pool, not to religious discrimination. 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. Under a new program, Thrace municipalities are hiring Muslims as public liaisons in citizen service centers. Muslims claim they are hired for lower level positions.

Unlike in Thrace, the growing Muslim community in Athens (composed primarily of economic migrants from Thrace, South Asia, and the Middle East and estimated by local press and experts to be between 120,000 and 300,000 strong) still its own official mosque or any official cleric to officiate at religious functions, including funerals. During the period covered by the report, press reports in 2003 and 2004 claimed that there are about 25 "unofficial" mosques in Athens. Members of the Muslim community must use the official muftis in Thrace for religious rites, so they always transport their deceased there for religious burials. Although the Parliament approved a bill allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in the Athens area, construction had not started by the end of the period covered by this report. The Archbishop of Greece and members of the Orthodox Church oppose the cultural center, claiming it may "spread the ideology of Islam and the Arab world" rather than act as a simple museum.

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 residents 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 in many civil and domestic matters under Muslim religious law, for which the State pays them. Hence the Government selects a committee of Turcophone Muslim notables, which recommends appointments to the 10-year mufti terms. 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 nongovernmental elections.

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 3 years as an interim measure pending resolution of outstanding problems. The interim period is extended every 2 years by presidential decree. Discussions within the former Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) government and the New Democracy party in the period before national elections in March have not resulted in any reforms to wakf administration.

Members of missionary faiths report having difficulties with harassment and police detention due to antiproselytizing laws. Church officials express concern that antiproselytizing laws remain on the books, although such laws no longer hinder their ministering to the poor and to children.

A law on alternative forms of mandatory national service for conscientious objectors with religious and ideological reasons took effect and provides that conscientious objectors may work in state hospitals, municipal and public services for 36 months in lieu of mandatory military service. Conscientious objector groups generally characterized the legislation, enacted in 1998, as a positive first step, but criticized the 36-month alternative service term for being punitive, because it is two and a half times longer than the regular 12-month period of military service. Alternative service for parents of 3 or more children is 15 months, while it is 3 months for nonconscientious objectors. Also, alternative service for repatriated Greeks is 20 months, while it is 6 months for nonconscientious objectors. Since 1998, all members of Jehovah's Witnesses who wished to submit applications for alternative nonmilitary service have been permitted to do so.

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. Members of the Muslim community in Athens are lobbying for Islamic religious instruction for their children. The neighborhood schools offer no alternative supervision for the children during the period of religious instruction; hence these children sometimes attend Orthodox religious instruction by default.

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, due to the destruction of files during the two world wars, the wakfs are unable to document ownership of much of their property. They have not registered the property, so 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.

During the reporting period, appeals courts in Thessaloniki overturned government tax office decisions to refuse nonprofit status to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The law prohibits cremation, and 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, both of which administer the region, continued. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Esphigmenou Monastery was awaiting a decision by the council of state regarding their appeal of a 2002 eviction order against the monks, but religious authorities claimed they wanted to settle this dispute out of court.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Some non-Orthodox church leaders report that their permanent members (nonmissionaries) do not encounter discriminatory treatment. However, police regularly detain Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses (on average once every 2 weeks) 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. Many report that, during this time, they are not allowed to call their lawyers and that they are abused verbally by police officers for their religious beliefs. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses appealed to the Ombudsman to denounce a series of incidents in September and October 2003 in Sparta involving the intimidating behavior of the police toward church members who were distributing religious literature to passersby. There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees apart from the problems of temporary police detention experienced by Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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 consider an ethnic Greek also an Orthodox Christian. 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 bishops warning parishioners not to visit clergy or members of minority faiths and neighbors, and requesting that the police arrest missionaries for proselytizing. However, with the exception of the Muslim minority of Thrace, most members of minority faiths consider themselves satisfactorily integrated into society. Organized official interaction between religious communities is infrequent.

Some non-Orthodox religious communities believe that they have been unable to communicate with officials of the Orthodox Church and claim 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 worshipers; church leaders instruct Orthodox Greeks to shun members of these faiths.

There were a number of Holocaust commemorative events throughout the country during the period covered by this report. A memorial to Greek-Jewish veterans of World War II was unveiled in 2003 in Thessaloniki, and in April a commemorative stone was placed at the railway station from which Jews were deported to concentration camps. The Government passed legislation establishing January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Anti-Semitism continues to exist, both in the mainstream and extremist press. The Greek public often does not clearly distinguish between Israelis and Jewish persons. The Wiesenthal Center and the Anti-Defamation League denounced the Greek press for anti-Semitic articles and cartoons on several occasions during the period covered by this report, particularly after Israeli forces killed Hamas leader Sheik Yassin. The Greek Jewish Community publicly refused to support the Wiesenthal Center's denunciations, but 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. Jewish monuments in Ioannina were desecrated three times in 2003. The Holocaust memorial in Thessaloniki was desecrated in February 2003. Police have been unable to find perpetrators. Anti-Semitic graffiti were painted, removed by authorities, and repainted in several spots in one of the busiest highways of Greece. Some schoolbooks still carry negative references to Roman Catholics, Jewish persons, and others. Bookstores in Northern Greece sold and displayed anti-Semitic literature including the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

In November 2003, Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis called Jewish persons "the root of evil" but later qualified his statement by saying he had meant to criticize the government of Israel. The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece said Theodorakis' statements recalled "ideas of the dark Middle Ages and slogans used by Nazi Germany" and spread "winds of bigotry and racism."

The Wiesenthal Center issued a travel advisory in November 2003 warning Jewish visitors about "the failure of Greece to curb growing anti-Semitism." Jewish community leaders do not support the advisory. The Wiesenthal Center protested the revival of traditions such as the "Easter burning of the Jew," which propagate hatred and fanaticism against Jews.

LAOS, a minority party, advocates for extreme right nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. LAOS leader George Karatzaferis won a seat in the European Parliament in June elections. The extreme right-wing group "Golden Dawn" regularly paints anti-Semitic graffiti on bridges and other structures.

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 Religious Affairs. The Ambassador and other Embassy 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, and Islamic communities. The U.S. Embassy and consulate general investigate every complaint of religious discrimination brought to their attention.

The Ambassador and embassy officers discussed the need for improved teaching of the Holocaust in elementary and secondary schools; the Ministry of Education is working with the Jewish Museum of Greece on a teacher-training conference in September and on increased school programs.

The consular section actively follows issues relating to religious workers' visas and property taxes.

The U.S. Embassy and consulate promote and support initiatives related to religious freedom. For example, Embassy staff gathers leaders of the religious minority groups in Athens together for representational dinners. In 2002 employees of the U.S. Embassy's consular section assisted Bible Baptist clergy to receive permission to visit all prisoners, not only those of the Baptist faith.

The Ambassador and embassy officials regularly visit religious sites throughout the country and meet with representatives of all faiths, soliciting their participation in Embassy social events.

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" and certain other denominations 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.

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 35,919 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10.1 million.

Strict enforcement of data protection regulations impedes the collection of official statistics on popular participation in religious life; however, independent surveys in 1996 and 1997 indicated that the population is not particularly devout. Only 15 percent of those surveyed considered themselves to be religiously active and closely followed the tenets of their religion. The majority, 55 percent, said that they practiced religion in their own way, or were nominally religious, but not regularly active in their religious community. Approximately 30 percent said that they were nonreligious.

The 2001 national census contained an optional question on religious affiliation, and 90 percent of the population provided a response. According to the census results, 55 percent of the country's 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 followers of Judaism. 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 re-

maining percentage of the population is divided between a number of other denominations. The largest among these is the Congregation of Faith, a Hungarian evangelical Christian movement. Other denominations include a broad range of Christian groups, including five Orthodox denominations. In addition, there are seven Buddhist denominations and three Islamic communities.

A 1996 law permits citizens to donate 1 percent of their income taxes to the religion of their choice and an additional 1 percent to the nonprofit agency of their choice. The Government nearly doubles the taxpayers donation, i.e. it adds 0.9 percent of the sum tithed to each church. Statistics from the collection of tax revenue voluntarily directed for use by religious groups confirm the ranking of traditional estimates of religious affiliation. In 2003, 14.6 percent of the taxpayers contributed $14.6 million (HUF 3 billion) to 114 faiths and the Government added $43.6 million (HUF 8.933 billion) to that total.

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 Day are all celebrated as national holidays. These holidays do not impact negatively any religious groups.

The 1990 Law on the Freedom of Conscience regulates the activities and benefits enjoyed by religious communities and establishes the criteria by which they attain that legal designation. To become registered as a religion, religious groups must submit a statement to a local county court declaring that they have at least 100 followers. The only question considered by the court is if the registration of the new church is constitutional. While any group is free to practice its faith, formal registration makes available to a religious group certain protections and privileges and grants access to several forms of state funding. The courts have registered 144 religious groups.

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 2003–2004 school year, 41 registered religious groups provided religious instruction to 525,197 students in public schools.

A 1994 government decree on the military chaplain's service created permanent pastoral representation for the four historic religions in the country's defense forces. The decree also requires the military to facilitate the rights of other religions to practice their religion and to provide pastoral care for members of the military. The Ministry of Defense funds and maintains the chaplain's service. Under the decree, soldiers do not receive preferential treatment for either foregoing or using the chaplain's service. This provision is respected in practice. A similar system exists for the provision of religious services to prisoners. The Ministry of Justice regulates it.

The Government allocates public funds to registered religions. In 2003, the Government allocated approximately $176.5 million (HUF 36.18 billion) 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 nonrestituted 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 generally remains constant year-to-year.

In 2003, the Government allocated $6.95 million (HUF 1.424 billion) to clergy 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 country's 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 require the Government to compensate religious groups for properties confiscated by the Government after January 1, 1946. In 2003, the Government paid religious groups $13.41 million (HUF 2.75 billion) as compensation for the assets confiscated during the Communist regime. In the first quarter of 2004, 46 properties valued $30.05 million (HUF 7.8 billion) were returned to the Catholic Church. By 2011, the Government is expected to pay an estimated total of $166.8 million (HUF 34.2 billion) to religious groups for buildings not returned. While these agreements primarily address property issues and restitution, they also have provisions addressing the public service activities of the religious groups, religious education, and the preservation of monuments.

At the end of 2003, there were 968 pending cases of real property that once belonged to religious groups, which the Government must decide whether or not to return before 2011. Real estate cases have involved 12 religious groups: 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 2003, the Government resolved cases involving 174 properties primarily belonging to the Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran churches. There were 61 properties returned to churches, and churches received monetary compensation for 113 properties. Overall 7,220 claims were made by religious groups for property restitution under the 1991 Compensation Law: 1,600 cases were rejected as inapplicable under the law; the Government decided to return property in 1,822 cases and gave cash payments in another 1,770 cases; approximately 1,000 cases were resolved directly between former and present owners without government intervention; and the remainder (968 cases) must be decided by 2011. Religious orders and schools have regained some property confiscated by the Communist regime.

During the period covered by this report, the Government signed an agreement with a foreign government allowing access to government archives on the Holocaust and is scheduled to supplement this commitment with agency-to-agency agreements to facilitate archival access for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. In April, the Government signed an agreement with the U.S. Government on the preservation of cultural heritage sites. This agreement will allow for the maintenance and preservation of Jewish cultural heritage sites that have fallen into disrepair. The Government has pledged its support for implementing this agreement in a concrete manner and has promised to help fund preservation projects under the agreement. Also in April, the Government dedicated the Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center, which was initiated under the previous government. The Government has made strong efforts to combat anti-Semitism by clearly speaking out against the use of coded speech by extreme right-wing ideologues, and the Prime Minister himself has publicly stated that Hungarians were also responsible for the Holocaust.

In January 2003, the Government reached an agreement with the Jewish community's organization Mazsihisz on compensation payments to Holocaust survivors and their heirs. The agreement settled a 6-year dispute between the Government and the Mazsihisz. Under the terms of the plan, which came into force the same year, qualified recipients received $1,724 (HUF 400,000) from the Government. Only applicants who complied with a 1994 registration deadline are eligible to participate in the program, a number estimated by Mazsihisz to be 150,000 persons. Mazsihisz stated that many potential beneficiaries did not originally register, either out of concern for identifying themselves on a government register as Jewish persons or from skepticism regarding the implementation of the 1992 compensation law.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government has demonstrated a willingness to treat the larger or longer-established religions more favorably than the minority religious communities. Several laws and government decrees specifically grant rights and privileges to historical religions that are not directly granted to other religious groups, such as in the decree on the military chaplain's service and, until January 2003, the tax code.

Before January 2003, the tax code only permitted tax-deductible donations to the country's large or long-established religions. For donors to have qualified for the deduction under the previous tax structure, a religion had to document one of the following: that it had been present in the country for 100 years or more, that it had been registered legally for at least 30 years (as no new religions were registered under the Communist regime, this essentially meant religions registered before 1925), or that the present religion's following equaled 1 percent of all tax contributors (approximately 43,000 persons). These criteria limited the tax benefit to only 14 of the 136 registered religions in the country. As of January 2003, an amendment

to the law governing state financing of religions made donations to any registered religion tax-deductible.

There were credible reports that the Government delayed and, in some cases, denied accreditation to religious schools run by smaller, newly established religions in a manner inconsistent with the law. An application by the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness to operate a theology institute was finally approved by the Government's accreditation board in 2003 after a 3-year delay. The Government has not subjected accreditation requests from the historical religions to similar scrutiny.

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

The Government took steps to strengthen its hate speech legislation in light of an overturned conviction. In addition, the Government has opened its national archives to Holocaust researchers and has agreed to allow the preservation of Jewish cultural heritage sites. Several high-level government officials, including Prime Minister Medgyessy, have publicly called on citizens to acknowledge their countrymen's participation in the Holocaust in an attempt to dispel the popular notion that the country's Nazi occupiers were solely responsible for the tragedy.

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.

Overall, society welcomed the increasing religious activity that followed the transition from communism. However, there also is some concern over the ease with which regulations on religion may be exploited, as well as concerns about the perceived undue influence that some "new religions" have over their followers.

The 1997 changes to the hate speech law that were intended to resolve conflicting court decisions and make it easier to enforce and stiffen penalties for hate crimes committed on the basis of the victim's ethnicity, race, or nationality proved inadequate. In early 2003, the Office of the Prosecutor successfully prosecuted a member of the extremist Justice and Life Party for publishing an anti-Semitic article in a local newspaper. In November 2003, the Budapest Appeals Court acquitted a former Member of Parliament, who is a Calvinist pastor, of a charge of incitement to hatred. Again, because of conflicting court decisions parliament passed a more restrictive law on hate speech, this time incorporating religious groups within its scope. Pressured from both the Right and the Left, President Madl referred it to the Constitutional Court for advisory opinion in January. In May, The Constitutional Court ruled that the law is too vague and returned it to parliament for refinement.

Reports of vandalism or destruction of Christian and Jewish property exhibited an upward trend. During 2003, the National Police reported 459 cases of vandalism to cemeteries and 108 burglary cases involving places of worship, compared with 200 cemetery vandalism cases and 50 burglaries to places of worship in 2002. During the first quarter of 2004, the National Police reported 135 cases of vandalism to cemeteries, and 15 cases of burglary involving places of worship. There is no data on which churches owned the cemeteries. Most police and religious authorities consider these incidents as acts of youth vandalism and not indications of religious intolerance.

Anti-Semitism remained a problem, which the Government continued to address. While there were no reports of anti-Semitic violence, 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. In October 2003, a weekly talk show, Ejjeli Menedek, reported on Holocaust denier David Irving, who made derogatory statements regarding Jewish persons. The show was subsequently cancelled. Jewish Community Mazsihisz representatives complained that an anti-European

Union (EU) movement used the Star of David in its material. They also requested the Ministry of Cultural Heritage to close a county museum exhibition highlighting the Arrow cross and Hungarian nationalism during World War II. The exhibition was closed, and the materials were returned to their owners. In January, an Israeli flag was burned at a small protest outside a Budapest radio station. The protest arose in response to an on-air statement by a broadcaster who allegedly called for all Christians to be killed. Charges were filed against three individuals for taking part in the burning of another nation's flag. The radio station was suspended for 1-month. During their visit to Hungary in April, the Chief Rabbi and the President of Israel spoke positively of the situation of the Jewish community in Hungary.

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 nongovernmental organizations that address issues of religious freedom. Through these contacts, embassy officers have tracked closely recent government efforts to modify the country's laws and the impact this might have on smaller, less well-established religions.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy played a critical role in negotiating the Agreement for the Preservation of America's Cultural Heritage Abroad, which will provide the basis for the preservation of Jewish religious and cultural sites in Hungary. The Embassy also played a key role in the negotiations for an agreement that secured access to Holocaust-era archives.

The Embassy also has remained active on issues of compensation and property restitution for Holocaust victims. Embassy officers have worked with Mazsihisz, the Hungarian Jewish Public Foundation, other local and international Jewish organizations, and with Members of Parliament and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, as well as the Prime Minister's Office to maintain a dialogue on restitution issues, promote fair compensation, and secure access to Holocaust-era archives.

The Embassy continues 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 Lutheran Church, which is the state religion, enjoys some advantages not available to other faiths in the country.

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 39,600 square miles, and its population is approximately 290,500. Most residents live on or near the coasts. The area surrounding the capital, Reykjavik, alone has approximately 60 percent of the country's total population.

According to the National Statistical Bureau, 250,051 persons (86 percent of the total population) are members of the state Lutheran Church. During the period covered by this report, a total of 1,042 individuals resigned from the Church, in comparison to 199 new registrants. Many of those who resigned from the state Church joined one of the Lutheran Free Churches, which have a total membership of 12,556 persons (4.3 percent). The breakdown in membership is as follows: Reykjavik Free Church—,933 members; Hafnarfjordur Free Church—4,127 members; and Reykjavik Independent Church—2,496 members. A total of 13,025 individuals (4.4 percent) are members of 21 other small recognized and registered religious organizations ranging from the Roman Catholic Church (5,582 members) to the First Baptist Church (10 members). There were 7,929 individuals (2.7 percent) who belonged to other or nonspecified religious organizations and 6,929 (2.4 percent) who were not part of any religious organization. There also are religions, such as Judaism, which have been practiced in the country for years, but have never requested official recognition. In official statistics, these religions are listed as "other and nonspecified."

Although the majority of citizens use traditional Lutheran rituals to mark events such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals, most Lutherans do not actively practice their faith. In a Gallup poll conducted in April 2003, 10 percent of respondents stated that they attend church one or more times a month, while 43 percent said 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 increased. Foreigners make up over half of the Catholic population in the country. 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 boat building industries. Two Polish priests serve the Polish Catholic community in the country. 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.

Mormons are the only significant foreign missionary group 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 3 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 Lutheran Church as the state church and pledges the State's support and protection of the Church. 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 2003, the Liberal Party presented to Parliament a bill to separate church and state; the bill remained under committee review at the end of the period covered by this report. Alliance Party leaders have also called for a review of the role of the state church.

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. 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 $103 (ISK 7,800) a year and a cemetery tax of approximately $40 (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 individuals who are not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belong to one that is not registered officially and recognized by the State, 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 reporting period, the Government gave the state church approximately $52 million (ISK 3.8 billion). Of that amount, the church tax funded $19 million (ISK 1.4 billion), the cemetery tax $9.2 million (ISK 678 million), and general revenues $23 million (ISK 1.7 billion). The state church operates all cemeteries in the country, and the $9.2 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 $1.8 million (ISK 130 million) to the other recognized religions and a total of $1.2 million (ISK 84.4 million) to the University of Iceland.

The Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs handles applications for recognition and registration of religious organizations. The 1999 law provides for a three-member panel consisting of a theologian, a lawyer, and a social scientist to deter-

mine the accuracy of 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 new 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.

The country's Jewish population is small and has chosen not to register as a religious community under applicable law.

A Sunni Muslim group attempted to register in 2001, but the Ministry of Justice rejected its application because it was incomplete. The group has reapplied, but a final review cannot take place until the group submits additional supporting documents.

Law Number 108 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, which regulates public elementary schools ("grunnskolar"), the Government requires instruction in religion and ethics based on Christianity during the entire period of compulsory education; that is, ages 6 through 15. Virtually all schools are public schools, with a few exceptions such as Roman Catholic parochial school, which is 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. The curriculum is not rigid, and 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 curriculum, but teachers ultimately teach mostly about Christianity.

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 urges school officials to provide children who do not wish to attend religious instruction in Christianity with alternative classes. The report also asks officials to give all children the opportunity to learn about different religions and faiths.

The Government is passive rather than proactive in promoting 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. One of the ministers of the state church, who is of Japanese origin, 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.

The Falun Gong requested a government apology stemming from the government's decision to deny many Falun Gong members entry due to security concerns during Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to the country. After they filed a complaint with the Parliamentary Ombudsman, who can make recommendations to the Government, in December 2003, the Ombudsman found that there was no cause for action.

There were no reports of physical violence against Jewish persons or acts of violence against, or vandalism of, Jewish community institutions. Incidents of harassment were extremely 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.

Abuse 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, it is still an important part of the country's cultural identity.

During the last decade, there has been increased awareness of other religious groups. Informal interfaith meetings have occurred, and two nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) assist new immigrants.

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 also maintains a regular dialogue on religious freedom issues with the leaders of various religious groups and NGOs.

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 a total area of 27,136 square miles, and has a population of approximately 4 million.

The country is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. According to official government statistics collected during the 2002 census, the religious affiliation of the population is 88.4 percent Roman Catholic, 2.9 percent Church of Ireland (Anglican), 0.52 percent Presbyterian, 0.25 percent Methodist, 0.49 percent Muslim, and less than 0.1 percent Jewish. Approximately 4 percent of the population were members of other religions or had no specific religious belief.

There was a rising number of immigrants and asylum-seekers in the country, and they tended to be of a non-Catholic faith. Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continued to grow, especially in Dublin. Immigrants and noncitizens encountered few difficulties in practicing their faiths. There were some difficulties for non-Catholics associated with the availability of facilities and personnel outside of Dublin, such as the inability to find a mosque in rural areas due to the small numbers of non-Catholics in those communities.

According to a survey conducted by the Catholic Bishops Conference, 63 percent of the 3.46 million Roman Catholics in the country attended mass once a week; however, another national poll found that only 44 percent attended once a week.

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.

While Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion, it was not favored officially or in practice. Due to the country's history and tradition as a predominantly Catholic country and society, the majority of those in political office are Catholic, and the major 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 Day, and St. Stephen's Day. These holidays did not negatively impact any religious groups.

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 controlled partially by the Catholic Church. Under the terms of the Constitution, the Department of Education must and does provide equal funding to schools of different religious denominations (such as an Islamic school in Dublin). Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

The Employment Equality Act prohibits discrimination in relation to employment on the basis of nine discriminatory grounds, including religion. An 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 the employment context (such as in education or provision of goods) based on the same grounds used in the Employment Equality Act.

In September 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.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. 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. In addition, the Garda (Irish police force) formed a Garda Racial and Intercultural Office whose aim is to increase an awareness and understanding between the police and the increasing number of ethnic and religious groups that are immigrating to the country. For example, the office often held seminars to educate the police about new minority groups and their religious sensibilities.

Society largely was homogenous; as a result, religious differences were not tied to ethnic or political differences. However, some citizens had political attitudes toward the conflict in Northern Ireland that were driven by their religious identities and loyalties. For example, some Catholics supported Nationalist and Republican parties or ideals in the north on the basis of their religious loyalty.

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 reg-

ular contact with all communities, including religious groups and NGOs that address issues of religious freedom on a regular basis.

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 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 a total area of 116,347 square miles, and its population is approximately 57 million. An estimated 87 percent of native-born citizens are nominally Roman Catholics, but only 20 percent regularly participate in worship services. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses form the second largest denomination among native-born citizens, numbering approximately 400,000 adherents. 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, who number an estimated 1 million. Buddhists include approximately 40,000 adherents of European origin and 20,000 of Asian origin. Scientologists claim approximately 100,000 members, Waldensians estimate approximately 30,000 members (concentrated mainly in the north-west), and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has approximately 20,000 members. A Jewish community of approximately 30,000 persons maintains synagogues in 21 cities. Other significant religious communities include Orthodox churches, small Protestant groups, Japanese Buddhists, the Baha'i Faith, and South Asian Hindus. Recent polls show 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 Waldensian Church. Similar accords, which are negotiated by the Interior Ministry 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 are 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. Subsequent to a series of church consultations with political leaders prior to the 2001 national elections, President Ciampi underlined the secular nature of the State and the Constitution's explicit separation of religion and State. In February Parliament passed legislation favored by the Vatican that 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. During the period covered by this report, prominent Catholic politicians joined the Pope and other church officials 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 March 2003, Parliament tabled proposed legislation from several parties requiring display of crucifixes in all public classrooms. In November 2003, the Appeals Court of Pescara revoked a judicial ruling issued in October 2003, which ordered the removal of a crucifix from a classroom; the earlier court had accepted the argument made by one student's father, who is the leader of a small Islamic association, that its presence discriminated against children of other faiths. In October 2003, President Ciampi argued that the crucifix is a symbol of the national identity and not only a religious emblem and was praised by several politicians and intellectuals for his position.

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.

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.

National, regional, and local authorities organize annual educational initiatives and other events to support National Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27. In April 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 is in process, but construction has not begun.

Increasing immigration, largely from China, South Asia, North and West Africa, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Turkey, 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 many 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 Guiseppe Pisanu and Senate President Marcello Pera, have underlined the need to integrate different ethnic groups present in the country in speeches and statements during the period covered by this report.

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 Guiseppe 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 October 2003 during the country's tenure in the rotating European Union (EU) Presidency (June–December 2003); the EU Council of Ministries 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.

Government units in the country 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 March 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 reporting 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.

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, such attempts are usually corrected upon the intervention of higher-level officials or courts.

The overall status of religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. President Nursultan Nazarbayev continued an initiative to promote dialogue among religions; a second international conference drawing regional dignitaries and religious figures was held in September 2003. However, the President and other senior officials also spoke out on the need to contain religious extremism, and officials at all levels continued to regard religious extremism with concern. Instances

of harassment of religious organizations by local officials decreased during the period covered by this report. Reports of local law enforcement officials visiting religious organizations for inspections also decreased during the reporting period.

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 understanding among religious groups. 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.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,052,540 square miles, and according to the Government's Agency for Statistics, as of February, the population was 14,961,900.

The society is ethnically diverse, and many religions are represented. Ethnic Kazakhs, who constitute approximately one half of the national population, historically are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School. Ethnic Uzbeks, Uyghurs, and Tatars, comprising less than 10 percent of the population, also largely are Sunni Hanafi. Other Islamic groups, which account for less than 1 percent of the population, include Shafit Sunni (traditionally practiced by Chechens), Shiite, Sufi, and Akhmadi. A sizeable population of ethnic Russians, and smaller populations of Ukrainians and Belorussians, are by tradition Eastern Orthodox; together they constitute approximately one-third of the country's population.

Due to the country's nomadic and Soviet past, many residents describe themselves as nonbelievers. Several surveys and researchers have reported low levels of the strength of religious conviction, though the results of their research vary. One researcher in 2003 estimated that only 10 to 15 percent of the population consider themselves to be believers, and that only 20 percent attend religious services. In July 2003 polling, the Kazakhstani Association of Sociologists and Political Scientists found that more than 50 percent of the population describe themselves as believers, although they also found that fewer than 20 percent regularly attend religious services. The country's highest concentration of observant Muslims, largely ethnic Uzbeks, traditionally lives in southern regions bordering Uzbekistan.

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 Protestant associations with a sizable number of congregations include Lutherans (traditionally practiced by Kazakhstani Germans who still account for approximately 2 percent of the population, despite sizable emigration), Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Pentecostals.

A small Jewish community, estimated at well below 1 percent of the population, has synagogues in several larger cities, including Almaty, Astana, and Pavlodar. There is a Roman Catholic archdiocese, adherents of which account for 2 percent of the population.

According to government statistics, there were 339 foreign missionaries in the country as of April. Missionaries are most active in the southern regions of the country and often come from Turkey, Pakistan, and other predominantly Muslim countries. There are also non-Muslim missionaries from the United States, South Korea, and Western Europe.

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 officials attempted on occasion to limit the practice of religion by some nontraditional groups. The Constitution defines the country as a secular state and grants the right to everyone to decline indicating a religious affiliation.

The National Religion Law, in contrast to laws governing other public associations, does not require religious organizations to register with the Government. It states that all persons are free to practice their religion "alone or together with others." Since the clause makes no reference to registration, many legal experts and government officials interpret it to ensure the right of members of unregistered groups to practice their religion; however, the law does specify that those religious organizations that wish to receive legal status must register. Registration requires a group to have at least 10 members and submit an application to the Ministry of

Justice. Religious organizations must have legal status to buy or rent real property, hire employees, or engage in other legal transactions.

Article 375 of the Administrative Code allows authorities to suspend the activities or fine the leaders of unregistered religious organizations. Although legal experts have disagreed, as have government officials, about whether Article 375 takes precedence over the National Religion Law on the obligation of religious groups to register, prosecutors rarely brought charges for nonregistration. In the past, prosecutors did bring such charges frequently, and lower courts cited Article 375 in sanctioning religious organizations for nonregistration. Most of these guilty verdicts were overturned on appeal. Only one known case under this charge was brought during the period covered by this report, and the court of first instance acquitted the accused.

In practice local officials, particularly in remote locations, often insist that religious organizations register at the local level; however, neither law nor regulation grants such officials the authority to register a religious group. Only the Ministry of Justice, which has branches at the national and oblast levels, may legally register a group. Although the law specifies a maximum of 30 days for authorities to complete the registration process, many religious groups have reported delays of several months or longer.

The national Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center reported that oblast authorities registered its branch in Northern Kazakhstan Oblast on January 12. The group had been trying unsuccessfully to register there since 1997.

The Jehovah's Witnesses' 2001 application to register in Atyrau Oblast was formally turned down in April 2003. They filed their latest application for registration in January, which was also turned down in March for alleged discrepancies between the Kazakh and Russian language versions of their charter. The group is already formally registered nationally and in each of the country's 13 other oblasts.

The Government made no attempt during the period covered by this report to settle the discrepancy between the National Religion Law and the Administrative Code. Previously, it had offered a new religion law or draft amendments as a means to reconcile the inconsistency. The last time the Government took such action was in 2001 when it submitted to Parliament amendments that included registration requirements for religious groups. In 2002, Parliament passed them, despite several objections raised by international experts and religious organizations, but the Constitutional Council rejected them after determining that certain provisions were unconstitutional. zThe Constitutional Council specifically ruled that the 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. Other provisions of the amendments not specifically ruled unconstitutional included: requiring that religious organizations be registered; banning "extremist religious associations;" increasing the membership required for registration from 10 to 50 persons; authorizing local officials to suspend the activities of religious groups for criminal violations of 1 or more of their members or for conducting religious activity outside of the place where they are registered; and requiring that foreign religious organizations be affiliated with a nationally registered organization. President Nazarbayev chose not to challenge the Council's April 2002 ruling; such a challenge would have required the Council to uphold the ruling by a two-thirds vote. The Government has proposed no new religious legislation.

Neither law nor regulation prohibits foreign missionary activity. In July 2003, the Government adopted a new legal procedure whereby missionaries may register with local authorities. The Government had not regulated procedures for registering foreign missionaries since the previous guidelines were annulled in 2001. Since the adoption of the new regulation, no religious groups have reported difficulty in obtaining registration for missionaries.

The Government exempted registered religious organizations from taxes on church collections and income from certain religious activities. The Government has donated buildings 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; Catholic and Jewish leaders have been included in such events as well. Leaders of other faiths, including Baptists, Adventists, and other nontraditional religious groups, at times also have participated in some events. Events organized by the city administration in Almaty exclude no religions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The President and other senior officials continue to regard with concern the presence of what they consider religious extremism. In April, the Government submitted a draft of new legislation designed to counteract all forms of extremism; most of the provisions in the proposed legislation are contained in current law and regulation. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that law enforcement authorities conducted intrusive inspections of religious groups throughout the country. Prosecutors have the right to inspect organizations registered with state bodies once a year, but in keeping with the continued overall improvement in religious freedom, there were no reports during the reporting period that these inspections, when they occurred, were overly intrusive or were considered harassment by any religious groups inspected.

The Government typically claims that religious groups' charters do not meet the requirements of the law when refusing or significantly delaying registration. Often authorities cite discrepancies between Russian and Kazakh language versions of groups' charters or refer charters for expert examination. In addition, because the law does not allow religious groups to engage in educating children without approval from the Ministry of Education, applications for religions whose charters include such activities can be refused.

The national Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center alleged continuing incidents of harassment by a number of local governments. It claimed that city officials in Kostanay, Aktubinsk, Atyrau, Ust Kamenogorsk, Pavlodar, Semipalatinsk, and Taraz denied the group permits to rent stadiums and other large public or private sites for religious meetings. However, the Center also reported that such denials were inconsistent and that officials in these and other jurisdictions at times have granted such permits. No other religious groups have reported similar instances of permits being denied. The Hare Krishnas received a permit in September 2003 to hold an event for 500 followers in a central city square in Almaty.

In keeping with the improving climate of religious tolerance, there were no reports that local the Committee for National Security (KNB) or police officials disrupted meetings in private homes during the period covered by this report.

No court cases against unregistered local Jehovah's Witnesses congregations were reported. The Union of Evangelical Baptists reported one court case against a churchgoer during the reporting period for allegedly participating in the activities of an unregistered group. In late April, the Karaganda city court acquitted him of the charge. In previous years, courts sometimes issued administrative injunctions against unregistered religious groups, including warnings, fines of $50 or less, or suspensions of the group's activities. When adequate legal counsel was brought in on appeal, the decisions most often were overturned. The decline during the reporting period of such cases was due to courts establishing the precedent that religious groups are not required to register.

In May 2003, police in the Zharminskiy region of Eastern Kazakhstan Oblast opened a criminal case against Baptist pastor Sergey Nizhegorodtsev. He was charged with nonpayment of a fine levied on him in 2002 by the Zharminskiy District Court for failure to register his congregation. However, Zharminskiy prosecutors dropped the case on May 28, 2003 agreeing with Nizhegorodtsev's assertion that the 2002 court decision had been illegal.

In November 2001, Baptist pastor Pavel Leonov was convicted by the Ayaguz District (Eastern Kazakhstan Oblast) Court of failing to uphold a September 2000 court order requiring his church to register. He was assessed a fine of approximately $135 (20,575 tenge). By the end of the period covered by this report, Leonov had not paid the fine, and authorities had made no attempt to collect it. Leonov did not appeal his case to a higher court.

In October 2001, a court in Kyzl-Orda sentenced a Baptist church pastor, Valery Pak, to 5 days in prison for failing to comply with a 2000 court order that had suspended the church's activities until it was registered.

The Zharminskiy, Kyzl-Orda, and Ayaguz congregations belong to the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, which has a policy of not seeking or accepting registration in former Soviet countries. There were no reports during the reporting period that police or prosecutors sought to suspend the activities of Baptist churches associated with the Council.

Government officials frequently expressed concerns regarding the potential spread of religious extremism in the south of the country. The KNB has characterized the fight against "religious extremism" as a top priority of the internal intelligence service and announced in November 2003 that it would produce a list of banned religious organizations. However, the Foreign Minister announced in April that such a list was unnecessary.

Religious rights observers contend that a draft law "On Extremism," which the Government put forward in April, does not clearly define extremism, religious or otherwise. Observers also believe that security officials informally monitor some religious activity, particularly Muslim imams' sermons.

The law does not prohibit foreign missionary activity. The Constitution requires foreign religious associations to conduct their activities, including appointing the heads of religious associations, "in coordination with appropriate state institutions." Foreign missionaries legally are entitled to register religious organizations; however, they generally are required to list a majority of local citizens among the 10 founders of the organization. Since the July 2003 promulgation of new procedures for the registration of foreign missionaries, no religious groups have reported their missionaries encountered difficulties with authorities. The lack of regulation governing missionaries between 2001 and 2003 led to some reports that authorities harassed missionaries or extracted bribes for their registration.

In 2002, officials in Southern Kazakhstan Oblast refused to grant a visa extension to Sayid Bukhari, a foreign missionary with the Akhmadi Muslim Community. Bukhari stayed in the country with uncertain status and was granted a 3-month visa in January. After local authorities again threatened not to renew his visa at the conclusion of that term, the Akhmadis reported that the local officials received orders from their superiors to relent and to grant Bukhari a longer-term visa.

Both the Government and the national Muslim organization 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.

Unlike in previous years, no religious organization, other than the Hare Krishnas, reported that they had been the subject of a news account portraying them, or nontraditional religions in general, as a threat to security or society.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities maintain that Hizb ut-Tahrir, a banned Islamic organization, is an extremist group. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir maintained that it was committed to nonviolence, the political party's strongly anti-Semitic and anti-Western literature called for secular governments, including in Kazakhstan, to be replaced with a world-wide Islamic government called the Caliphate. The Government does not consider Hizb ut-Tahrir to be a religious organization and charaterizes the handing out of pamphlets by Hizb ut-Tahrir members as incitement for political and terrorist purposes. On several occasions during the period covered by this report, authorities detained their members for distributing literature. More frequently than in previous years, authorities filed charges against these individuals and courts convicted several of them, generally for "inciting social, national, tribal, race, or religious hatred." However, in other cases alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members simply continued to be held in custody for brief periods and then released. During the period covered by this report, there were no reported cases of government officials harassing observant Muslims under the guise of combating Hizb ut-Tahrir activities, other than those actively engaged in pamphleteering.

On April 16, a Shymkent city court sentenced Hizb ut-Tahrir member Rakhmatulla Ibadullayev to 4 years in prison for participating in the activities of an illegal organization and for inciting social, national, tribal, race, or religious hatred. Ibadullayev had been detained in August 2003, along with two associates, for allegedly operating a Hizb ut-Tahrir printing house, which the security service shut down. News reports indicated that Ibadullayev's two alleged accomplices had escaped.

According to an unconfirmed report by the Interfax-Kazakhstan News Agency, on November 22, 2003, three young persons were detained at the central mosque in Pavlodar for distributing Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets. One of the suspects was sent to Almaty for a hospital sanity examination. The other suspects were sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment for "numerous deliberate acts to cause social, national, clan, racial, or religious hostility by a group of persons" and "active participation in public and religious unions that are not registered."

On July 7, 2003, a district court in Almaty convicted two alleged members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Asan Shagibayev and Baurzhan Kultayev, and sentenced them to 3 years in prison. They were arrested for distributing Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets in June 2002 and charged with participating in the activities of an illegal organization and for inciting social, national, tribal, race, or religious hatred. In February, the court referred the case back to police for additional investigation. Both men denied the

charges against them and maintained that the KNB manufactured the cases. Kultayev further alleged in a complaint filed with the Almaty prosecutor that KNB officials had beaten him. On August 19, 2003, the Almaty city court denied their appeal.

At least two other Hizb ut-Tahrir members or alleged members were convicted of similar crimes during the period covered by this report.

In 2001, according to local press reports, local KNB officials in Southern Kazakhstan Oblast beat to death 21-year-old Kanat Biyembitov after they detained him for allegedly belonging to Hizb ut-Tahrir. The Government concluded that two KNB officials bore some responsibility for the death and stated that it had released them from their duties; however, no criminal action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

The "Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kazakhstan" is reported to have removed from their respective mosques five imams who participated in a Community Connections program upon returning from the United States. Following a request by the U.S. Ambassador, the five imams were reinstated in their positions in 2003.

Followers of the Hare Krishna movement faced some continued harassment during the period covered by this report. On July 19, 2003, a follower from a neighboring country was ordered deported by a district court; however, the same court reversed the deportation order several days later. On November 2, 2003, police also raided a Krishna commune in a district of Almaty Oblast and reportedly confiscated two foreign members' passports. Krishna followers said that prosecutors returned the passports 2 days later. Officials of several government agencies had raided the same commune in April 2002, and the prosecutor filed suit to revoke the group's registration in Almaty Oblast in early 2003. 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. Krishna followers at the commune said there has been no government harassment since that time.

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.

Other than the brief detentions of several Hizb ut-Tahrir members, 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the country has emerged as the leader in the former Soviet Union for its encouragement of religious tolerance and its respect for the rights of religious minorities.

National and regional officials continued to be active in stopping restrictions on religious freedom and harassment of religious groups by local officials. The frequency of higher-level intervention has created a climate in which local officials less often harass nontraditional religious groups. During the period covered by this report, activism by national and regional officials also led to solutions to longstanding conflicts between nontraditional religious groups and local authorities. The registration of the Jehovah's Witnesses branch in Northern Kazakhstan Oblast is one example. Another example is the establishment of an oblast-level commission to improve the treatment of a Hare Krishna commune in Almaty Oblast. Prosecutors brought only one known court case during the reporting period for nonregistration of a religious group, and authorities otherwise did not sanction any such groups.

The President continued his "Peace and Harmony" initiative in September 2003, hosting the Congress of World Religions in Astana. Delegations of more than a dozen international religious delegations were invited and attended.

The Government made further efforts to promote religious tolerance in its ranks. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, for instance, invited the country's Chief Rabbi in April to give seminars to its police officers on sensitivity to religious minorities.

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. There exists general wariness within the population, particularly in rural areas, of nontraditional religions.

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 are proactive in reminding government officials of these commitments and have also pressed the Government to resolve the legal uncertainty surrounding the registration of religious groups and the status of missionaries. The Embassy maintains contact with a broad range of religious communities and reports on instances of 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 the U.S.

In May members of the U.S. Senate and high-level Department officials met with the speaker of the Senate, Nurtay Abykayev, and discussed interfaith issues.

On January 22, a two-member team from the collaborative State-USAID Working Group on Religion and Society accompanied nine Islamic leaders on a bus tour of USAID project sites in the southern part of the country. The trip fostered broad understanding of U.S. Government development objectives in the country. At the end of the road tour, the leaders offered additional development ideas.

The Embassy conducted a number of exchange programs for religious leaders during the period covered by this report. In November 2003, the Embassy sponsored a 3-week visit to the United States of a group that included the leader of an evangelical Christian organization, the rector of a Muslim university, and a regional government official. The program of the visit included meetings with U.S. government officials, academics, nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders, and representatives of multiple U.S. religious organizations. The Embassy also sponsored the 2-week visit to the United States in June of a group of 10 Imams and other Muslim religious leaders from Kyzl-Orda Oblast. Their program included meetings with a variety of religious organizations, U.S. government officials, academics, and NGO leaders. They were also hosted by U.S. families and participated in religious services. The Embassy sponsored a similar group, with 20 participants from Zhambyl and Southern Kazakhstan Oblasts, in April 2003. Upon their return to the country, that group produced a multimedia presentation of their visit and presented it to numerous audiences.

During May 2003 and May 2002 visits to the country, the Embassy helped officials from the U.S. Holocaust Museum conclude agreements with the two government agencies holding archival records relating to Holocaust victims. The agencies, the National Archives, and the KNB have been forthcoming during the period covered by this report with all records at their disposal.

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.

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 considers a threat. In April the Prime Minister signed a decree and plan of action aimed at "combating religious extremism" for the period of 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, strengthening of the passport regime, conducting an information campaign, and preventing inter- and intra-faith conflicts.

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

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 in the country, including minority groups, and with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that monitor religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total 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—66.3 percent, Uzbeks—14 percent, Russians—11.2 percent, Dungans (ethnic Chinese Muslims)—1.1 percent, Uighurs (ethnically 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 State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA), as of May 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 19 churches throughout the country. Jews, Buddhists, and Roman Catholics account for approximately 3 percent of the population, and their adherents practice their religions openly in one synagogue, one temple, and three churches. In addition there are 249 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 examples of 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. 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 in which a larger ethnic Russian population exists. 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 primarily are 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, the United States, Germany, Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. They represent an estimated 20 religions including Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unified Church of Christ of Evangelists, and Korean Presbyterians. According to the SCRA, starting from 1996, approximately 1,060 missionaries have been registered by the SCRA, of whom approximately 809 were Christian. During the period covered by this report, 166 missionaries conducted activities, of whom 120 are Christian and 46 are Muslim; however, 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. All of those missionaries expelled represented various "totalitarian sects." or groups the SCRA considers to go against 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 restricted this right in practice, in particular for Muslim groups it considered to be a threat to the country. The Constitution provides for a secular state and for the separation of church 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 organiza-

tions 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 holidays (Noorus, Kurman Ait, and Orozo Ait) and one Russian Orthodox holiday (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 holidays, and the greetings are printed in the mass media.

The SCRA promotes religious tolerance, protects freedom of conscience, and oversees laws on religion. 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 conducting activities 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 Kyrgyz 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 never has 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 has in the past sometimes taken up to several years. The SCRA has also in the past returned some applications numerous times for corrections and re-submission. 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 of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reported that five of its affiliates that attempted to register in 2003 were registered by the SCRA, including a number whose applications had been pending for some time.

The Government recently launched a new website documenting the religious organizations currently operating in the country. According to the SCRA, there are over 2,000 registered religious entities, including mosques, churches, foundations, nongovernmental organizations of a religious nature, and religious educational institutions. Of these registered entities, 309 are Christian. The SCRA reported that its staff traveled around the country to help unregistered religious entities prepare applications for registration; according to the SCRA, 629 new religious entities were registered during the period covered by this report, the majority of which were previously unregistered Muslim mosques and houses of worship. Many of the newly registered entities did not register in the past because they did not feel the need or did not want to fill out the paperwork.

Previously, several religious organizations, including the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), reported difficulty registering with the SCRA. Almost all were eventually registered, sometimes after a lengthy delay.

The RCC has been registered since 2002. The RCC in Bishkek first attained legal status under Soviet law in 1969; however, the SCRA notified the church that it would have to re-register as a foreign religion after the issuance of Presidential Decree 319 in 1996, which states that a religious organization may be denied registration or its registration may be suspended if its activities do not comply with the law or are dangerous to state security, social stability, interethnic and interconfessional relations, or the health and morals of citizens. Such suspensions or refusals of a religious organization's registration are subject to judicial appeal. 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 February 2002, the SCRA approved the Catholic Mission's application for registration, and registration was finalized in October 2002.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the country's largest Protestant church with approximately 18 affiliates and approximately 10,200 members, of whom 30 percent are ethnic Kyrgyz, reported ongoing delays in registering several of its regional branches with the SCRA. At the end of period covered in this report, the main church in Bishkek along with 6 of the 18 affiliates were currently registered while another 5 affiliates had applied for registration and were awaiting

approval. The remaining seven affiliates were preparing applications for registration but had not submitted them.

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 is 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 due to lack of funding.

During the period covered by this report, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Kyrgyz Republic, or Muftiat, in cooperation with SCRA, conducted programs to educate Muslims about negative aspects of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HUT), a militant Islamic group. Volunteers visited villages in the south to teach traditional Islamic values.

Beginning in 2004, the Islamic University began a program to oversee all Islamic schools in the country, including madrassas. In July 2003, the Islamic Institute acquired 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. Muslim leaders and government officials agreed to the change in 2002.

The Government works through the SCRA to promote interfaith dialogue and encourage religious tolerance. The SCRA hosts meetings of religious groups to bring the faiths together in open forums. The SCRA assists various faiths 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. At the end of the period covered by this report, 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 with either 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. 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. A religious organization may be denied registration or its registration may be suspended if its activities do not comply with the law or are dangerous to state security, social stability, interethnic and interconfessional relations, or the health and morals of citizens. Such suspensions or refusals of a religious organization's registration are subject to judicial appeal. In addition, the Government has expressed concern over the growing number of Christian groups operating in the country.

In 2001, the Procurator General proposed amending the Criminal Code to include tougher sentences for those convicted of "religious extremism," and in 2002 senior law enforcement officials testified in Parliament that the primary danger to the State came from religious extremists. Religious leaders and human rights activists continued to note with concern that the SCRA frequently uses the term "national security" in its statements. Law enforcement authorities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the National Security Service (SNB), often play a role in investigating religious organizations and resolving interreligious disputes.

HUT is not registered with the Government, which considers it an extremist organization and therefore its activities to be illegal. There are between 2,000 and 4,000

HUT active members, mainly in the south; however, there are signs that the group is also gaining new recruits in the north. The Muftiat issued a fatwa (legal decree) denouncing the activity of HUT in 2002. In November 2003, the Supreme Court sustained the verdict by the Lenin District Court of Bishkek, which banned four religious organizations that it deemed to be extremist and for having alleged ties to international terrorist organizations: Hizb-ut-Tahrir, "Islamic Party of Turkestan," "Organization for Freeing Eastern Turkestan," and "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, the construction of mosques, and activity of Islamic groups. During the period covered in this report, this expert commission was formed, issued decrees on taking control of construction of mosques, and adopted several decisions denouncing activities of HUT and other Islamic groups.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reported that a number of ongoing bureaucratic and legal problems remained unresolved. Although the church had some positive results on obtaining registration of its affiliates, 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 August 2003, the Ministry of Finance denied the Church of Jesus Christ's appeal of the demand of the tax inspectorate of Bishkek's Oktyabr Oblast for payment of $110,000 (4.8 million soms) on member donations to the church. Authorities allegedly threatened to confiscate the church's building as payment. The church's pastor contended that the tax bill was an attempt to punish and shut down the church because one-third of its 9,500 members are ethnic Kyrgyz, who are traditionally Muslim. In December 2003, the Church reported that during a meeting between its representatives, Tax Police officials, and officials from the Tax Commission, the latter agreed with the church that donations were not taxable and sent the case back to the Tax Inspectorate. In May the Tax Inspectorate closed the case, thereby officially ending the investigation.

In October 2003, the SCRA suspended the activities of the Unification Church, which was registered as a social, rather than a religious organization, and had semi-official status, at the request of the Procurator General's office. According to the SCRA, the latter requested suspension of the activity of the Unification Church because it did not, as the law requires, indicate in its registration papers to which world religion it adhered.

In May 2003, Asan Erkinbayev, the head of the local administration, closed 7 of the 9 mosques in the Karadarya district of Jalal-Abad 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. One of the mosques has since officially registered with the SCRA but remains closed. Despite complaints from government officials in Bishkek, Erkinbayev has refused to reopen any of the mosques.

There are reports that the Government monitors some religious groups, including Protestant denominations and Muslim groups. On May 14, Kyrgyz and Uzbek security officers were discovered secretly filming a mosque congregation near the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border.

On April 5, a government decree and plan of action was signed instructing the SNB to propose measures to "restrict and prevent the activities of missionaries who propagate religious fundamentalism and extremism and reactionary and Shiite ideas." Few members of the SCRA or the Bishkek office of the OSCE have seen the resolution, and the SCRA denied involvement in drawing it up. Among the proposed groups to be restricted were members of the Ahmadiyya community, a Muslim proselytizing movement, which originated in India and is considered un-Islamic by many traditional Muslims. In May 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.

The arrest and prosecution of persons accused of possessing and distributing literature of HUT continued to increase. Although most arrests continued to occur in the south and involved ethnic Uzbeks, some ethnic Kyrgyz were also arrested over the past year in both the south and the north for distribution or possession of the banned literature. In the first 4 months of 2004, 38 persons were arrested or detained for distribution or possession of literature "inciting ethnic, racial, or religious hatred." Twenty of them were subsequently formally charged. During 2003, 89 persons were detained for distribution of HUT literature. Those arrested typically were charged with violation of Article 299 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits the distribution of literature inciting ethnic, racial, or religious hatred.

On June 28, Prime Minister Tanaev announced that the Government would create a special board to review religious literature and warned that HUT has been gaining membership in the north. Tanaev also warned that the group had begun to portray itself to human rights groups as persecuted by the Government. During the period covered by this report, the Prime Minister had not signed the order and no action had been taken to create the special board.

In March a small number of conservative Muslims in Karasuu in the southern Osh region protested the presence of a male obstetrician in a local maternity hospital, citing that Shari'a law prohibits a man to see a woman naked, except when the woman's life is in danger. A small number of men refused to take their wives to the hospital while in childbirth to avoid the male obstetrician, and several men have requested divorces after learning that a man delivered their children. Local and SCRA officials have acknowledged the rights of the male obstetrician and claim that there were also female obstetricians in the hospital; however, they have also expressed their sensitivity towards the religious beliefs of the local population. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not resolved the case.

Female students who attend public schools continued to be forbidden from wearing religious headscarves (hijab) while in school. The SCRA has stated that students, who for religious reasons choose to wear clothing that would indicate adherence to a particular religion, may choose to attend religious schools. In spring 2003, teachers in several schools in the Osh region prohibited pupils from wearing the hijab in school. At the Lomonosov school in Karasuu district of the Osh Oblast, school authorities held meetings with students, where police threatened the girls with arrest if they continued to wear the hijab. After some of the parents sought assistance from the school principal, they were told that their children should leave school if they continued to wear the hijab. At two schools in the cities of Jalal-Abad and Suzak, in Jalal-Abad Oblast, two girls were told not to wear the hijab to school; however, when the girls disobeyed the order, no action was taken to stop them and the schools have since refrained from reminding the students of the rule.

There were no reports of continued harassment of Muslim children by teachers in schools. In April 2003, some teachers in the Jalal-Abad region at the Khamza school told children not to perform daily prayers, even at home. A teacher at the school harassed the children who admitted that they prayed at home by singling them out and hitting them on the head. Teachers at the Babur school in the Bazarkorgon district also told students not to pray.

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

In January, police in the city of Jalal-Abad detained for five hours six men suspected of possessing or distributing HUT literature. Upon release from jail, the six men alleged that they had been beaten while in police custody. One of the men displayed bruises on his biceps, while another had bruises on his legs. Procuracy officials said that an investigation had been opened into the conduct of the police involved and that the six men detained were also under investigation for violating Article 299 of the criminal code. The case was still being investigated at the end of the reporting period.

There were no other 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. 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 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.

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 March 2002, there were reports that a mosque had broadcast calls for violence against Jewish persons over a loudspeaker in central Bishkek. The Government investigated the incident, and mosque leaders apologized to the local Jewish Cultural Society.

Although banned by the Government, HUT continues to operate and attract new members. There are between 2,000 and 4,000 HUT members active in the country, and government officials reported that the number of members of Kyrgyz ethnicity is increasing in contrast to the early 2000s, when members were predominantly ethnic Uzbeks.

HUT is considered a terrorist organization in Uzbekistan; however, while Kyrgyz authorities insist the group is dangerous, government officials have declined to take such drastic measures as the Government of Uzbekistan has done in protecting its borders and arresting members. The Government is especially concerned that strict Uzbek measures to crack down on the group have helped to foment extremism in the region.

There were reports of occasional hostility towards Christians, specifically Protestants and other "nontraditional" groups during the period covered by this report. According to the SCRA, Muslims made up 84 percent of the total population in 2001, and that figure has declined to 79.3 percent. Some government officials blamed this decrease in the number of Muslims on the effects of Christian proselytizing and warned that such heavy rates of conversion risked starting an ethnic conflict. There were reports 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 broadcast programs disparaging Protestant churches and the Church of Jesus Christ, calling for the Government to ban such groups. According to sources, interviews with representatives of the SCRA, Russian Orthodox priests, and Muslim leaders were featured on the programs.

According to Forum 18's religious freedom survey, in January, Protestant missionaries working in the south have aroused particular concern among local devout Uzbeks. It reported that Muslims were angered that the authorities monitored and arrested HUT members but did not interfere in the work of Protestant groups. There also were reports of rumors circulating among Muslims that authorities were deliberately following an anti-Islamic policy and were trying to turn Muslims toward Christianity.

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. On several occasions, Embassy representatives met with government officials and discussed the problems experienced by the Church of Jesus Christ. Embassy representatives met with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups, and with NGOs monitoring religious freedom.

In November 2003, the Ambassador hosted an annual Iftaar dinner for Muslim leaders and government officials. Also in November 2003, the Ambassador gave a speech devoted to Eid al-Fitr, and on February 1, the Ambassador addressed in the Kyrgyz language thousands of Muslims who gathered on the main square of Bishkek for the Eid al-Adha to pray.

In September 2003, the Embassy participated in the reopening ceremony of the 800-year-old Shakh Fazil Mausoleum in Jalal-Abad Oblast, a pilgrimage site for Muslims throughout the Ferghana Valley, which was renovated with funds provided through the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation.

The State Department announced a request for grant proposals 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 Embassy also announced a request for grant proposals for local NGOs to conduct after-school religious tolerance program for Muslim youth in the more conservative rural southern regions. These programs will focus on after-school activities and involve parents, religious leaders, teachers, and local officials.

A U.S. government funded institutional partnership commenced between the Social Sciences Research Council and the Islamic University in Bishkek to supplement

the religious curriculum with an international one and establish exchange visits between university teachers in the country and in the United States.

During the period covered by the report, the Embassy actively distributed publications about Muslim life in the United States. In May 2003, it funded a group from Osh TV to travel to the U.S. to film a documentary about Muslim life in America. During his visit to the U.S. in June 2003, the Head Mufti and his deputy met with U.S. Government officials. In June, a group of Muslim leaders traveled to the U.S. to participate in an International Visitors' Program on religious tolerance and diversity. The participants were Kyrgyz Muslim leaders from Batken Oblast, which contains a majority of the Muslim population in the country. The group met with State Department 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.

In April the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded a special bus tour for religious leaders, which took place in the southern region, known for its predominantly Muslim population. During this program, local Islamic leaders were familiarized with a number of the projects aimed at developing local communities funded by USAID.

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 remain 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 a total area of approximately 25,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at 2.3 million. The three largest faiths are Catholicism, Lutheranism, 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, the Justice Ministry had registered 1183 congregations. This total included: Lutheran (308), Roman Catholic (264), Orthodox (125), Baptist (96), Old Believer Orthodox (67), Seventh-day Adventist (50), members of Jehovah's Witnesses (13), Methodist (13), Jewish (13), Buddhist (5), Muslim (15), 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 practice their faith regularly. In 2003, churches provided the following estimates of membership to the Justice Ministry: Lutherans (556,000), Roman Catholics (430,405), Orthodox (350,000), Baptists (6,530), Old Believer Orthodox (80,070), Seventh-day Adventists (3,956), Mormons (854), Jehovah's Witnesses (154), Methodists (1,012), Jews (685), Buddhists (100), Muslims (356), and Hare Krishnas (135). Although no reliable statistics exist, it is widely acknowledged that a significant portion of the population is atheist. Orthodox Christians, many 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.

Citizens' passports indicate the ethnicity of the bearer only when requested by the bearer. However, ethnicity is not listed on the personal information page of the passport, but is instead stamped onto a blank visa page. Under this system, which is common throughout the region, Jewish persons are considered an ethnic group and are listed as such rather than as Latvian or Russian.

December 25 is celebrated as Christmas and is a recognized national holiday. Good Friday and Easter Monday are also national holidays. The Orthodox Church wants the Government to recognize Orthodox Christmas, but the Government had not adopted this plan 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. 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 is now being replaced by a new organization called the Ecclesiastical Council. This new 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.

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 embassy staff, 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. A 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; however, the law does not permit the simultaneous registration of more than one religious association (church) in a single confession, and the Government occasionally denies applications on this basis.

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 2003, the Religious Affairs Administration proposed amendments to the Law on Religious Organizations that would abolish restrictions on single association registration. However, the Latvian Ecclesiastical Council, which has broad powers in these areas, declined to endorse the amendments on the grounds that they were drafted in haste and not well thought-out.

Visa regulations effective since 1999 require foreign religious workers to present either an ordination certificate or evidence of religious education that corresponds to a Latvian bachelor's degree in theology. The visa application process remains cumbersome. Although the Government generally was cooperative in helping resolve difficult visa cases in favor of missionary workers, problems still persisted.

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 have criticized this provision.

The Law on Religious Organizations stipulates that only representatives of Evangelical Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believer, Baptist, and Jewish reli-

gions may teach religion to students in public schools on a voluntary basis. 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 may provide religious education in private schools only.

Property restitution has been substantially completed, although most religious communities, 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. 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, suspicions remain toward newer nontraditional faiths.

The Latvian Historical Commission, under the sponsorship of President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, has continued to promote Holocaust awareness throughout society. In 2003, a commission to honor Zanis Lipke, a Latvian who helped save dozens of Riga Jews during World War II, formed to develop a memorial.

Vandalism of Jewish cemeteries has occurred occasionally in the past. However, no conflicts or violent incidents of anti-Semitism occurred during the reporting period. The Government actively discourages anti-Semitism; nonetheless, cultural anti-Semitism—though hard to quantify—persists.

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 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's Consular Section 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 in ethnic and religious tolerance and of U.S. experts to Latvia for Historical Commission activities. The Embassy sponsored a series of academic exchanges and lectures on Holocaust issues and is supporting the Zanis Lipke memorial project in an advisory capacity. In addition, the Embassy is working 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 develop, the production and publication of a Holocaust education curriculum, and the preparation of teachers to teach Holocaust history and awareness. The Embassy has also awarded a Democracy Commission Grant to the Jewish Museum in Riga, which has embarked on an effort to research and document mass graves.

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 Latvian and foreign. Problems that members of certain minority religions have experienced at the Citizenship and Migration Department when seeking visas and residency permits often are discussed.

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 a total land area of 61.7 square miles (160 square kilometers) and as of June 2002, a total population of 32,883, according to the Office of the National Economy. There are 25,676 Roman Catholics, 2,348 Protestants, 1,347 Muslims, 254 Eastern Orthodox, 70 Buddhists, 32 members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 13 Anglicans, 17 Jews, 14 Baha'is, 8 New Apostolics, 8 members of other religions, and 3,569 persons who were undecided.

There are no significant foreign missionary groups in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOMLEGAL/POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Constitution provides for freedom of creed and conscience, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Criminal Code prohibits any form of discrimination or debasement of any religion or any of its adherents. The Constitution makes the 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 Catholic Church but also to other denominations. The budget is allocated proportionately according to membership numbers. The Roman Catholic Church's finances are integrated directly into the budgets of the national and local governments. The 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. All religious groups enjoy tax-exempt status.

The Archdiocese of Vaduz is 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 December 1997. The transaction is intended to allow for 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.

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 order. Visa requests normally are not denied and are processed in the same manner as requests from other individuals or workers.

In the course of the on-going discussion on the redefinition of the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church, parents of secondary school pupils were granted the automatic right to choose between traditional confessional religious education (provided for by the Catholic Church or the Protestant community) and non-confessional classes on "Religion and Culture." However, confessional religious education for primary school pupils remains an issue of debate. A working group representing the local communities, religious teachers (catechists), and the Department of Education has worked out an agreement with the Archbishop of Vaduz that retains the compulsory nature of confessional religious education at the primary school level. The agreement regulates the employment of religious teachers, the authorization of teaching materials, and the supervision of religious education, but some local communities oppose the accord. The mooted agreement grants the Church autonomy in setting the curriculum and supervising religious education, and

gives the Archbishop the final say on employment decisions of religious teachers, including dismissals. The agreement provides for a complementary supervisory role of the local communities; under the current system, the Department of Education is in charge of supervising religious education. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Protestants are the only other religious community allowed to offer religious education in primary schools. Members of other religious groups are not required to attend these classes. Groups other than the Catholic Church and the Protestants are free to regulate their own religious education.

The Government collaborates with religious institutions by supporting interfaith dialogues 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

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.

LITHUANIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion except in cases where religious activities contradict the Constitution and the law, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, 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 relation among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, although members of religious minorities occasionally are subject to acts of intolerance. The country's Jewish communities expressed concern over an increase in anti-Semitic remarks of fringe groups and over a series of editorials containing anti-Semitic statements that appeared in a major daily newspaper. The political leadership of the country publicly criticized anti-Semitic statements when they occurred and particularly denounced the inflammatory editorials.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and in discussions on Lithuania's strategy for addressing the country's Holocaust legacy.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 25,174 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.5 million. The 2001 population census indicated that approximately 79 percent of the inhabitants considered themselves to be Roman Catholics; in April there were 702 Catholic parishes. The second largest religious group (some 140,000) adheres to the Orthodox Church, which has 50 communities concentrated in the east, along the border with Belarus. The "Old Believers" numbered 27,000; they have 57 communities. An estimated 20,000 Lutherans (54 communities) resided in commu-

nities primarily in the southwest. The two branches of the Evangelical Reformed community had approximately 7,000 members in 14 communities. The 5 Sunni Muslim communities numbered approximately 2,700 members, while the Greek Catholic community had approximately 300 members. The Jewish community numbers approximately 4,000, although only 1,200 of them belong to 1 of the 7 religious communities. The majority of Lithuanian Jews are secular and do not belong to a religious community. An estimated 9.4 percent of the population does not identify with any religious denomination. According to 1998 research data, approximately one third of the country's Catholics attend church services at least once a month. Data on religious participation for members of other faiths is not available.

Karaites, while not unique to the country, exist in few other locations in the world. Some consider Karaite to be a branch of Judaism; the religion is based exclusively on the Old Testament. Two houses of worship, one in Vilnius and one in nearby Trakai, serve the Karaite religious community of approximately 250 members. The Karaites have been in the country since 1397. The Government recognized the Karaites as a distinct ethnic group. Karaites speak a Turkic-based language and use the Hebrew alphabet. Their community president also is their only religious leader.

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.

Approximately 0.23 percent of the population belongs 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 New Apostolic Church. According to the Ministry of Justice, a total of 1,031 traditional and 164 nontraditional religious associations, centers, and communities have officially registered with the new State Register of Legal Entities. All communities have to register if they seek official status, which they require to have a bank account, own property, and address the Government. The number of religious nontraditional associations decreased following the consolidation of one religious association, the New Apostolic Church, and the Ministry of Justice's cancellation of the registration of some associations that "have not shown signs of activity during the past 8 years."

Foreign missionary groups, including Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and members of Jehovah's Witnesses are also 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 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." The religious teachings of churches and other religious organizations, their religious activities, and their houses of prayer may not be used for purposes that contradict the Constitution and the 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.

The Constitution divides religious communities into state-recognized traditional groups and others. In practice, however, a four-tiered system exists: traditional, state-recognized, registered, and unregistered communities. Traditional religious communities and associations are not required to register their bylaws with the Ministry of Justice to receive legal status. Nontraditional religious communities must present an application, a founding statement signed by no fewer than 15 members who are adult citizens of the country, and a description of their religious teachings and their aims. The Ministry must review the documents within 6 months. Legally, the status of a "state recognized" religious community is higher than that of a "registered" community but lower than that of a "traditional" community.

The law stipulates that nontraditional religious communities may be granted state recognition if they are "backed by society" and have been registered in the country for at least 25 years. Both traditional and state-recognized communities can receive state subsidies; however, only traditional groups receive the subsidy regularly. The law grants property rights for prayer houses, homes, and other buildings to religious communities, associations, and centers, and permits construction that is necessary for their activities. Traditional associations and communities receive an-

nual financial support from the Government. Other religious communities are not eligible for regular financial assistance from the Government; however, they may receive government support for their cultural and social projects.

The law specifies nine religious communities that have been declared "traditional" and therefore are eligible for governmental assistance: Latin Rite Catholics, Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed Church members, Orthodox Christians (Moscow Patriarchate), Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites. They do not have to pay social and health insurance for clergy and other employees; they can register marriages; and they are not subject to a value-added tax (VAT) on such services as electricity, telephone, and heat. Only traditional communities have the right to teach religion in state schools and buy land to build churches (other communities may rent it). Only their clergy and theological students are exempt from military service, and only their top religious leaders are eligible for diplomatic passports. They also may have military chaplains. In addition, they have the right to establish subsidiary institutions.

Registered religious communities constitute the third status group; they do not receive regular subsidies, tax exemptions, social benefits, or military exemptions enjoyed by traditional and state recognized communities but can act as legal entities and thus rent land for religious buildings.

Unregistered communities have no juridical status or state privileges, but there were no reports that any such groups were prevented from worshipping or seeking members.

There is no separate government agency addressing religious groups; a small department in the Ministry of Justice handles requests of religious groups for registration. In November 2001, the Government reestablished the position of advisor for religious affairs, which it had abolished in March 2001, and appointed a person designated by the Catholic Church. The decision to abolish the position had contributed to a more evenhanded approach to religious matters; some observers believe that its reestablishment may benefit the Catholic Church more than other religions. The Prime Minister's advisor for Cultural and Jewish affairs follows relevant issues within the Jewish community.

For the second consecutive year, Parliament deferred granting of "state recognized religion" status for the United Methodist Church of Lithuania. Several other communities (The New Apostolic Church, Pentecostals, and the Seventh-Day Adventists) have also applied or reportedly plan to apply for state registration.

In 2000, the Constitutional Court confirmed the principle of separation between church and state in the sphere of education, by ruling that in-state educational institutions, classes or groups may not be co-established with state-recognized traditional religious associations. The Court also ruled that if either public or private educational establishments are sponsored jointly by a state institution and a religious group, the group may not set any religious test for employment of staff not connected with religious instruction. Finally, the Court ruled that the heads of state educational establishments could not be appointed and dismissed by government institutions on the recommendation of a religious association. The Catholic Church criticized the Court's ruling.

In 2000, the Government and the Holy See agreed to establish a military Ordinariat to provide religious support to Catholic members of the military service in the form of military chaplains. In 2002, the Ministry of Defense and the Catholic Church signed a regulation on military chaplains' activities; there were 15 chaplains at the time the regulation was signed. The Ministry of Defense provides material support for the Ordinariat and its places of worship. Other traditional churches and religious groups also can provide religious support to the military services. Alternative military service within military structures is available, but there is no option for alternative nonmilitary service, as requested by members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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 State." 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 Saint's Day (November 1), Christmas, and Boxing Day (December 26). The list of holidays can be changed 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

Local observers criticized 2002 draft amendments to the Law on Religious Communities and Associations, initiated by the Catholic Church. The Government accepted the amendments and forwarded them to Parliament for approval in the fall of 2002, but Parliament had not begun consideration of the amendments, by April. The Government's advisor for religious affairs said in a public interview that the amendments will "help defend against the entrenchment of destructive sects." The amendments would further limit certain activities to one or another religious groups of the four-tiered system. They contain a clause that only traditional religions may conduct religious instruction in state schools, and that only their religious ceremonies may be held there. The draft amendments also introduce a more cumbersome procedure for recognizing religious communities. Nontraditional religious communities will not be registered unless the Ministry of Justice says that their teaching is in line with human rights, freedom, and public order. If adopted, the law would also require a religious association seeking the status of "state recognized" religion to unite at least 0.1 percent of adults, effectively limiting such recognition to Jehovah's Witnesses only. Most notably, the law would disqualify the United Methodist Church of Lithuania.

The Ministry of Justice remains responsible for receiving registration applications and issuing registration permits, but in January the new State Register of Legal Entities assumed management of the database of registered religious communities. New communities of nontraditional religions now pay a registration fee, but new communities of traditional and state recognized religions register for free. Since 1995 the Ministry of Justice has turned down two applications, those of the Osho Ojas Meditation Center and the Lithuanian Pagans Community (Old Sorcerer). In August 2003, the Ministry of Justice declined a new request for registration of the Osho Ojas Meditation Center on the grounds that the center is not a religious community. The Ministry recommended the Center to register as a public organization. The Center sued the Ministry, and, in November 2003, a Vilnius administrative court ordered the Ministry to review the case. In June, the Ministry again refused to issue the registration permit to the center; Ministry experts concluded that the meditation practiced by this group is not a religious practice and that it violates accepted moral norms. The Center intends to appeal this decision through the courts. In 2002, following objections by the Catholic Church, Parliament suspended the granting of status as a traditional community to another pagan group, the Old Baltic Faith Community Romuva.

The operations of foreign missionary groups within the country are not restricted. However, the Government appears to be continuing preferential treatment in this area for the nine traditional religions.

According to the Constitution, state and local teaching and education establishments are secular. However, in February 2003, the Vice Minister of Education admitted in a public interview that, due to an agreement with the Holy See, Catholic priests have the final say in hiring teachers for religious instruction in state schools. The law provides that only religious instruction of traditional and other state-recognized religious communities may be taught in state educational institutions. At the request of parents from these communities, schools can offer classes in religious instruction. In practice parents can choose classes in religious instruction or classes in ethics for nonreligious education. The Government is obliged by law to finance religious instruction (of traditional faiths only) in state schools, and to fund fully schools of traditional religious groups and schools co-founded with traditional religious groups. In addition, the Government may, and often does, support schools run by nontraditional religious groups, who have the right to establish private schools and receive partial state funding.

Since 2001, amendments to the Law on Religious Communities and Associations grant full government funding only to the educational institutions of traditional religious organizations. The governmental Department of European Law had criticized the amendments for discriminating against nontraditional religious communities and associations. The Department implied that although the Government has the right to provide different legal statuses for different religious communities, differences in status should not result in differences in rights and privileges. The Government subsequently passed a different law that attempted to correct the negative effect of the amendment on non-traditional communities by providing a voucher mechanism for schools established by such nontraditional communities.

The law grants all religious communities equal opportunity in regaining control over former property previously used for conducting religious services. However, the Catholic community has been more successful in regaining its property than many other religious communities. Some religious properties, including 28 synagogues, were returned to the Jewish community, mostly from 1993 to 1996. A number of

claims were successfully resolved, while others are still pending. Lack of funds for compensation and protracted bureaucratic obstacles are the primary problems preventing the return of private property. The Government has taken no action on the problem of restoring property of religious institutions that no longer exist and has no plans to do so.

In early 2002, the Government established a commission on communal property restitution to identify communal property eligible for restitution and to propose amendments to the law on restituting property to religious communities so that the Jewish secular community (the majority of Jewish citizens) can benefit from the restitution process. The Government intends to submit the amendments for Parliamentary ratification once all property claims of the Jewish community are clarified and verified. In 2003, the Government allocated $38,000 (110,000 Litas) for archival research to verify the lists of Jewish communal property objects that the Jewish Community of Lithuania and the World Jewish Property Restitution Organization had submitted. In 2004, the Jewish Community of Lithuania submitted an expanded list of properties, which the archivists had not verified by the end of the period covered by this report. In addition, a project to reconstruct historic Jewish quarter buildings in Vilnius Old Town began in 2004. The official Jewish Community of Lithuania criticized the project, which has mainly private funding, as overly commercial and not resulting in substantive property restitution. They believe the project does not substantially benefit the Jewish community.

In spring 2002, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of an appeal by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the 2001 Vilnius First District Court decision's that the Vilnius City Council had violated the previous owners' and tenants' rights when it returned four buildings to the Church in 1992 and 1993. The Church had appealed, asserting that it had owned the properties before they were nationalized in 1945, and that restitution had been carried out according to the law. According to the ruling, the Church may regain ownership of, or compensation for, the four buildings in Vilnius Old Town. In February 2003, the Supreme Court again ruled in favor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in a lawsuit related to another lawsuit filed in 2001, and the Church regained ownership of the buildings in Vilnius.

The Government's commission to coordinate the activities of governmental institutions to investigate whether the activities of religious, esoteric, or spiritual groups comply with the law includes representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Education, Health, and Foreign Affairs, the General Prosecutor's office, and the State Security Department. The Minister of Justice appoints the chairman of the commission. The commission was established in 2000 following some parliamentarians' calls for increased control of "sects," following negative coverage of some religious groups in the media. The commission takes as its guidance domestic laws and the recommendations (No. 1412 and No. 1178) of the Council of Europe, which seek to ensure that activities of religious groups are in line with the principles of a democratic society, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. In 2003, the commission investigated the conditions under which esoteric, spiritual, and religious groups may spread their faith via educational institutions. In particular the commission looked at how many groups were renting premises from state educational institutions. Separately the commission investigated the alleged involvement of Satanists in the desecration of cemeteries.

In June 2003, Stanislovas Butkevicius, a Member of Parliament, resubmitted his 2001 legislation "On Barring the Activities of Sects." The Parliament's Legal Department criticized the draft, which had not been presented for discussion during the period covered by the report.

In March, the Parliament established a Working Group on Issues of Spiritual and Religious Groups following appeals from persons whose relatives the religious "sects" 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," two terms which encompass both recognized and unrecognized religious groups, the Parliament gave initial approval in early June to amendments to the Criminal Code and Administrative Code. The draft amendment to the Criminal Code introduces fines and imprisonment for up to 3 years for religious groups, communities, and centers that use psychological violence to prompt a person or his/her relative to pursue illegal action or prevent them from pursuing legal action. The draft amendment to the Administrative Code sets out fines for individuals seeking to implement religious goals in violation of society's security and public order, as well as 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 persecution targeting specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Between January 2003 and April, the Government registered a Catholic parish, a Catholic female monastery, two Catholic social centers, and a Catholic organization; an Orthodox community; a Lithuanian Lutheran Church community and 11 of its parishes; and 39 Old Believer communities. Also, following a court decision, another autonomous group, an Old Believer community, registered during this time. The Government granted legal status to four nontraditional religious communities in 2003. There were no registrations of nontraditional communities in January–April 2004, in part due to the introduction of a more complicated registration system in 2004.

The Government made an effort to support post-World War II restitution efforts during the period covered by this report. In September 2003, the Government returned 46 Torah scrolls to an Israeli spiritual and heritage group for distribution among Jewish congregations worldwide. However, the return of a few remaining Torahs at the National Museum has not been actively discussed.

In February, the Klaipeda district court overturned a lower court's ruling, which had denied the requests of two members of Jehovah Witnesses for alternative nonmilitary service, provisionally fined them, and sentenced them to 1 year in jail. The Government is exploring the possibility of introducing alternative service in nonmilitary structures for conscientious objectors.

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 Evangelic, Old Believer, and Jewish communities, appealed to state authorities and courts during the period covered by this report in an attempt to limit the activities of their rivals, often by preventing a certain faction's registration as a religious community. The State did not take any action to this end and attempted not to involve itself in internal disputes of various religious communities. However, in April and June 2003, Vilnius administrative courts ruled to create separate new Old Believer communities. At the end of May, the Lithuanian Jewish community temporarily shut down the Vilnius synagogue, following a disorderly dispute in the synagogue between the Orthodox and the Chabad Lubavich Jewish communities.

Activities of some nontraditional religions ("sects") raised concerns within sectors of society. For example, since December 2003, parents opposed to their children's membership in the Unified Church have been protesting the registration of the second community of the Unified Church in Lithuania. (The first community was registered in 1993 by a Cabinet decision.)

An estimated 10 percent of the population before World War II was Jewish. More than 200,000 Jewish persons (approximately 95 percent of that population) were killed in the Holocaust. The country still is reconciling itself with its past and working to understand it better. In 1998, President Valdas Adamkus established a historical commission to investigate both the crimes of 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 several years, the country's Jewish communities have expressed concern over an increase in anti-Semitic remarks made by extremist and a few, more mainstream, politicians. The political leadership of the country and most media outlets generally criticize anti-Semitic statements when they occur.

The Seimas (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 Lithuanian 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.

Anonymous anti-Semitic comments repeatedly surfaced on the Internet, most notably during the Fall 2003 visit of the Israeli Knesset speaker, who criticized the country's participation in the Holocaust, and 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.

In June 2003, media reports prompted the State Security Department to investigate the publication of the "Protocols of the Zion Elders" in a low-circulation periodical Zemaitijos Parlamentas, or Parliament of Zemaitija, causing the periodical to cease publication.

In December 2003, members of the National Democratic Party, led by a member of the Siauliai city council, attempted to disrupt a Hanukkah menorah-lighting ceremony and insulted members of the local Jewish community. The Siauliai mayor publicly apologized for the incident, although the ethics panel of the Siauliai city council failed to censure the instigator.

During the period covered by this report, fringe and anti-Semitic groups gained attention by participating in various political rallies supporting the embattled and later impeached President. However, extremist political parties did not appear to have gained any significant traction with the populace as a result of this increased publicity.

Several Lithuanian state institutions received anonymous anti-Semitic proclamations in February. The proclamations railed against Jewish persons, using an epithet that Lithuania's Ambassador to Israel, Alfonsas Eidintas, cited as an example of Nazi propaganda in his book "Jews, Lithuanians, and the Holocaust." In response, government representatives spoke out against anti-Semitism.

In February, a popular national daily "Respublika" carried a series of editorials with obvious anti-Semitic overtones. The series was entitled "Who Rules the World?" and the final editorial provided the reader with an answer—the Jews. The article made use of a cartoon reminiscent of Nazi propaganda. The editorial blamed Jewish organized crime figures for exploiting the Holocaust tragedy to avoid punishment for their criminal activities, and it focused on the alleged failure of the Lithuanian Jewish community to disassociate themselves from such criminals. The main point of the article was that Jewish persons, as the wealthiest and most powerful societal group in the world, control world events. 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, the Parliament formed a working group to improve legislation punishing incitement of discord, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia.

In April, 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.

A March poll indicated that anti-Semitism is more alarming to residents in large cities, while people living in rural areas tend not to notice it. Respondents of older generations had a poorer opinion of Lithuanian-Jewish relations, whereas people aged between 18 and 25 more often define their relations as good.

The Jewish community of Lithuania has argued that, while most school textbooks accurately and fairly present the Holocaust, some perpetuate unfavorable stereotypes of Lithuania's pre-World War II Jewish community and thereby promote intolerance. Although the Ministry of Education attempts to ensure the historical accuracy of school textbooks, the Lithuanian educational system allows a great deal of leeway for individual teachers to choose their own texts. Teachers are therefore able to use textbooks that are not recommended by the Government and that may portray an unfavorable and outdated view of Lithuania's pre-War Jewish 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 maintains 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 use the Embassy as a vehicle to voice their complaints, and the Embassy encourages religious leaders to keep the Embassy informed of their views on the status of religious freedom and any complaints. The Embassy has been 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 maintains 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 Lithuania's Jewish community to monitor properly the situation.

The Embassy has continually engaged government officials at all levels on issues relating to religious freedom. In March 2003, in response to anti-Semitic articles published in the daily newspaper "Respublika," Embassy raised its concerns at the Ambassadorial level with the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy also released multiple 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 anti-Semitism in general. The Foreign Minister and Prime Minister specifically mentioned their concern for the country's international image in their censure of the articles and in calls for a criminal investigation against "Respublika's" editor-in-chief.

During the period covered by this report, 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.

In the summer of 2003, two Lithuanian secondary school teachers participated in a teacher-training initiative in the U.S. that sought to promote and develop Holocaust education.

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 a total 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 approximately 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 members of Jehovah's Witnesses are represented in smaller numbers. The number of professed atheists reportedly is growing.

There are no significant foreign missionary groups. Many small, nontraditional religious groups are represented in the country, 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 religions or 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 of clergy. Pursuant to negotiated agreements with the Government, the following religious groups receive such support: Roman Catholic; Greek and Russian Orthodox; Jewish; and some Protestant denominations.

In January 2003, the Government signed a convention to extend this support to the Anglican Church; the legislation needed to complete this convention was passed in May. Legislation covering similar conventions was also passed in May for the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox Churches. An application for financial support for the Muslim community has been under consideration for over 6 years. The Muslim community's agreement to name a national representative and single interlocutor allowed discussions to proceed on their desire to receive similar government funding; however, there was no agreement by the end of the reporting period.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Shrove Monday; Easter Monday; Ascension Day; Whit Monday; Assumption Day; All Saints Day; All Souls Day; Christmas Day; 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 2 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 Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist Churches have an agreement for the provision of instruction in the Protestant religions within the overall framework of religious instruction in the school system. There are oral agreements between Catholics and Protestants at the local level to provide religious instruction to Protestant students, as required, during school hours. Protestant instruction is available on demand, and provision of instruction in other faiths may be offered in response to demand.

The State subsidizes private religious schools. All private, religious, and nonsectarian schools are eligible for and receive government subsidies. The State also subsidizes a Catholic seminary.

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.

Abuse 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, and Jewish faiths work well together on an interfaith basis. Differences among religious faiths are not a significant source of tension in society.

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.

MACEDONIA, FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF

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 non-state actors, and focus on a unified state for all citizens, has maintained a status of respect for religious freedom. The law places some limits on religious practice by restricting the establishment of places of worship and restricting where contributions may be made.

The generally amicable relationship among the various religious communities contributed to religious freedom. However, an area of concern is the deterioration in relations within the Orthodox Church community, specifically between the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox churches. The Government openly sided with the Macedonian Church in this ongoing 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 a total area of 9,781 square miles, and its population is approximately 2 million. The country has two major religions: Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Nominally, approximately 66 percent of the population is Macedonian Orthodox, approximately 30 percent is Muslim, approximately 1 percent is Roman Catholic, and approximately 3 percent is of other faiths (largely various Protestant denominations). There is also a small Jewish community in Skopje. Religious participation tends to focus on major holidays or life cycle events.

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 and the collection of contributions.

The constitutional provision for religious freedom is refined further in 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, and all other religions as religious groups. However, there is no legal differentiation between religious communities and groups. In 1999, the Constitutional Court struck down several provisions of the 1997 law, and in practice the remaining provisions are not enforced consistently.

The Government requires that religious groups be registered. The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups contained a number of specific requirements for the registration of religious groups; these were struck down by the Constitutional Court in 1999. Consequently, there was considerable confusion over which procedures still applied, and several foreign religious bodies experienced delays in their efforts to register. This law tends to favor traditional denominations, registered as "communities". Other denominations registered as religious "groups" underwent stricter scrutiny by the Republic Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities, compared to traditional religious communities or organizations. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of any delays or difficulties. In practice, religious groups need to register to obtain permits to build churches and request visas for foreigners and other permits from the Government.

In the spring, the Republic Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities introduced a new requirement that applicants for a religious worker visa must present evidence of completion of a theological education. During 2003, there were no reports that any applications for registration or visa issuance were denied.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups places some restrictions on the establishment of places of worship and parochial schools. 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 persons who are not members of that particular religion. The Government does not enforce actively most of these provisions of the law, but it acts upon complaints when they are received.

In June, the trial of Bishop Jovan (Zoran Vraniskovski) for inciting religious and ethnic hatred was ongoing and being monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Jovan also is accused of embezzling Macedonian Orthodox Church funds. Jovan led a schism within the Macedonian Orthodox Church that he and his followers refer to as "the Ohrid Archbishopric." They are closely aligned with the Serbian Orthodox Church and, like the Serbian Church, continue to reject the Macedonian Orthodox Church's 1967 claim of autocephaly, or independent status. The Public Prosecutor's Office brought the charge against Jovan following his January 11 arrest as he conducted a liturgy in his Bitola apartment. Police acted on complaints from building residents that the service had disrupted public peace and order; he was released from pretrial detention on January 30. On February 5, the United States delegation to the OSCE formally raised its objection to Jovan's inappropriate detention.

Jovan's home was vandalized on February 20, and unknown intruders forcibly cut the hair of several nuns present. Jovan claimed the attackers were state agents, but there was widespread speculation that Jovan's followers staged the attack to generate international sympathy. At the end of the period covered by this report, an investigation was ongoing.

Jovan was also arrested and detained for 5 days in July 2003 on charges of trespassing and disturbing the peace. He had attempted to baptize his niece at a Macedonian church; authorities claimed his attempt to do so constituted trespassing since he had earlier been defrocked by the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and therefore was a not a member of any recognized religious group.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups specifically allows for 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 were able to obtain religious worker or other worker visas. On July 22, 2003, U.S. citizen Serbian Archbishop Jovan Mladenovski was delayed at the Macedonia-Serbia border while authorities verified that he did not intend to perform religious work in the country in transit to Greece. He was permitted to resume his journey after a brief delay.

Churches and mosques often are built without the appropriate building permits; however, the Government has not taken any actions against religious buildings that lack proper construction permits. In the past, several Protestant groups have been unable to obtain building permits for new church facilities due to bureaucratic complications that affect all new construction. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of complications and a registered Protestant group completed construction of a new church in Skopje.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups also places some limitations on the collection of contributions by restricting them only to places where religious rites and activities are conducted; however, in practice these provisions of the law are not enforced.

Children below the age of 10 years may not receive religious instruction without the permission of their parents or guardians. A law provides for religious education in the schools on a voluntary basis; however, the Government has not introduced implementation guidelines.

The issue of restitution of religious properties expropriated by the former Yugoslav Government still has not been resolved fully. Some progress was made in restitution of previously state-owned religious property. Many churches and mosques had extensive grounds or other properties that were expropriated by the communist regime. Virtually all churches and mosques have been returned to the ownership of the appropriate religious community, but that is 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 is unlikely that religious communities will gain restitution of many of the expropriated properties.

In November 2003, the Jewish community met with the U.S. Ambassador to raise the issue of a recent incident in which despite the 1997 law on property restitution prohibiting the sale or transfer of any "Jewish" property, a parcel of land with a small structure on it in the center of Skopje had been transferred. According to the 1997 law, this transfer should be reversible. The Jewish community representatives indicated that they had notified the Prime Minister as well as the Minister of Finance, who responded with statements of support. They added that the transaction was approved by the Ministry of Transportation. In April, the Jewish community announced the restitution of six properties but expressed some frustration with the slow pace of developments.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

As of June, a judge was considering the Bektashi religious sect's suit against 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 the complex in August 2002 and continue to occupy it.

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, Bishop Jovan 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 government. Parliament's unanimous January 23 vote supporting the Macedonian Church's independence reflected public sentiment. The Government at times sided with the Macedonian Church by applying the law against Jovan and Macedonian Church clergy who declared loyalty to the Serbian church.

The religious communities in the country often reflect an ethnic identity. Specifically, most Muslims are ethnic Albanians. However, there are a number of ethnic Macedonians who are Muslim. Ethnic Macedonians contend that they often are associated with the policies of ethnic Albanian Muslims, which they do not always support. In addition 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.

During the period covered by this report, there were reports of vandalism of religious properties. In February, two explosions occurred in Bitola: one at a furniture store owned by an ethnic Macedonian Muslim and the other at the Asan Baba mosque. In March during the period of unrest in Kosovo, unknown attackers threw several Molotov cocktails at a mosque in Kumanovo. None of the Molotov cocktails exploded, and there was only minor damage to the mosque. Later during the period covered by this report, it was reported that two churches in the Tetovo region had been vandalized following Easter services. A collection box was stolen, but damage was minor, leading some to assert that the act was criminal in nature and not necessarily religious. There were no reports of destruction of places of worship.

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 new Government's policy of ethnic and religious tolerance.

The Ambassador and other Embassy representatives have met with the Archbishop of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the defrocked Bishop Jovan, and the Minister of Interior in connection with the dispute between the Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox churches. On each occasion, the Embassy has urged respect for religious freedom and the rule of law.

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, which essentially consists of 3 islands in the Mediterranean Sea, and has a total 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. While some political leaders diverge from Catholicism, most of the country's political leaders remain practicing Roman Catholics. On May 1, the country became a member of the European Union. Along with its European counterparts, the governing Nationalist Party, with its Christian democratic foundations, made a strong bid to include a reference to "Europe's Christian heritage" in the European Constitution.

Most congregants at the local Protestant churches are not Maltese; many British retirees live in the country, and vacationers from many other nations compose the remainder of such congregations. There are approximately 680 Jehovah's Witnesses, and 148 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The Bible Baptist Church has 30 members and the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches has about 100 affiliates. There is one Jewish congregation. Zen Buddhism and the Baha'i Faith also have about 30 members each. There is one Muslim mosque and a Muslim primary school. Of the estimated 3,000 Muslims in the country, approximately 2,250 are foreigners, approximately 600 are naturalized citizens, and approximately 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." 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 of nonpastoral land to the State 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. Some governmental policies, such as a ban on divorce, reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church.

There are six religious holidays that are considered to be national holidays: The Motherhood of Our Lady (January 1); St. Paul's Shipwreck (February 10); Good Friday and Easter Sunday (dates vary between late March and April); the Assumption (August 15); and Christmas Day (December 25). 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.

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 Terrorists

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, 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 non-Catholic faiths is conducted freely and openly. To promote tolerance, school curriculums include studies in human rights, ethnic relations, and cultural diversity as a part of values education for 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. Whenever possible, 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 continues 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 a Ramadan Iftaar dinner hosted by the Ambassador for resident Muslim diplomats and community leaders and increased outreach to the local chapter of the World Islamic Call Society.

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 are 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 Jehovah's Witnesses experiencing harassment from local town councils, and Orthodox priests and adherents. During the period covered by this report, there were several anti-Semitic acts in the separatist region of Transnistria, including the desecration of a Jewish cemetery and the attempted burning of a synagogue.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy specifically raised concerns about some religious groups' persistent registration difficulties to the Government State Service on Religious Issues.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 13,000 square miles, and its population, according to the Statistics Department's annual book for 2003, is 4.2 million. Due to illegal and fraudulent migration practices, the Migration Department's best estimates indicate that between 500,000 and one million Moldovan citizens work abroad. The most prevalent destination countries include Russia, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Greece, and more recently Great Britain and Ireland. The predominant religion is Christian Orthodox. Ninety percent of the population nominally belongs to one of two Orthodox denominations. The Moldovan Orthodox Church, according to the State Service on Religious Issues, has 1,194 parishes; the Bessarabian Orthodox Church has 124 parishes. 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 Church are entwined with the culture and patrimony of the country. Many self-professed atheists routinely celebrate religious holidays, cross themselves, and even 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, Jewish persons, followers of Reverend Moon, Molocans (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 2 congregations, and a combined total of approximately 250 members. According to the most recently available numbers, the Jewish community has approximately 31,300 members, including approximately 20,000 living in Chisinau; 3,100 in Balti and surrounding areas; 2,200 in Tiraspol; 2,000 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 freedoms, 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 Moldovan Orthodox Church receives some favored treatment from the Government. The Metropolitan of Chisinau and All Moldova has a diplomatic passport. Other high-ranking Orthodox Church 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. A religious organization wishing to register must present a declaration of creation, by-laws, and an explanation of its basic religious beliefs to the State Service on Religious Issues. The State Service on Religious Issues enters the religious organization into the Register of Religions within 30 working days. Under the new procedures, at the request of the State Service on Religious Issues, 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 provide that religious organizations are prohibited 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 State Service on Religious Issues continues to deny the registration of some groups, such as the Spiritual Organization of Muslims. Members of this organization repeatedly tried to register with the State Service on Religious Issues and their applications were denied because the State Service claimed their documents were not in order. A number of other organizations have been denied registration or encountered difficulties in connection with their registration applications.

In 1999, amendments to the Law on Religions legalizing proselytizing went into effect. 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.

In 2002, a new draft Law on Religions, which contained numerous contentious provisions, was circulated. The draft law originally contained numerous restrictive measures. The draft law has since been revised, and it appears that many of the restrictive articles have been deleted. At the end of the period covered by this report, the law was in the final stage of examination by the Government before being sent to Parliament.

In February 2003, a new Law on Combating Extremism was passed by Parliament and took effect in March 2003. Critics of the law raised concerns that the law could be used to abuse opposition organizations, which could include religious organizations or individuals who may support or have political ties to certain par-

ties. By the end of the period covered by this report, this law had not been used against any religious organizations.

A new Criminal Code, adopted by Parliament in April 2002 and in effect since June 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 of the fulfillment of their obligations as citizens." Drafters allegedly copied the passage almost word-for-word from the previous code, which was passed in 1961 when the country was part of the Soviet Union. No organization was prosecuted under this new code during the period covered in this report.

Article 200 of the Administrative Offenses Code, which was adopted in 1985, 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 has reported being fined under this provision of law for holding its religious services in a location registered to a charitable organization. The Government charged that their activities are not in line with the stated activities and purposes of the charitable 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.

In 2000, Parliament amended the Law on Education to make "moral and spiritual instruction" mandatory for primary school students and optional for secondary and university students. The program was introduced gradually, beginning in 2001, for first graders, and then in 2002 and 2003 for second and third graders, respectively. In some schools, there is a class specifically on religion, although this course is conditioned on a request and approval by the parents, and the availability of funds to cover the cost of the course. There are a number of theological institutes, seminaries, and other places of religious education in the country.

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. There are no comparable schools for other religious faiths and no reports of such schools for other religious faiths. 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 related schools, including those operated by Agudath Israel and public schools, is approximately 300.

The authorities in Transnistria also impose registration requirements that negatively affect religious groups and have denied registration to some groups. In April, a new draft Law on Religions, which reportedly contained numerous contentious provisions, was brought before the Transnistrian Supreme Soviet. Following strong objections from the Orthodox Bishop of Tiraspol and some legislators, the draft was sent back for revisions. Despite these protests, the objectionable provisions of the draft law are reportedly strongly supported by a number of high-level authorities in Transnistria. It is likely that the Supreme Soviet will consider the revised version of the draft law in the fall.

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 hold services in homes, nongovernmental organization (NGO) offices, and other locations. In other cases, the groups obtain property and permits in the names of individual members. Individual churches or branches of officially registered religious organizations are not obliged to register with local authorities; however, the local branch must register locally if it wants to make legal transactions as a legal body, including the ability to receive donations in its name.

In 2001, the Government declared the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, the successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church for purposes of all property ownership, although no attempt has been made to seize those properties in the hands of the Bessarabian Church, which is subordinate to the Bucharest Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In February, the Supreme Court repealed the Government's 2001 decision.

In April, in response to an appeal submitted by the Government, the Supreme Court rescinded its February ruling, making the Moldovan Metropolitan Church once again the legal successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church. The Bessarabian Church, which regards itself as the legal and canonical successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church, does not accept this decision and has said it will take its case to the European Court of Human Rights. The Bessarabian Orthodox Church was formed in 1992 when a number of priests broke away from the Moldovan Orthodox Church, and was only officially recognized in 2002, after years of being denied recognition. 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 or the Bucharest Patriarchate.

In May 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, which is based in the United States. The State Service on Religious Issues failed to implement the decision in the stipulated 30 days and subsequently asked the Court for a 2-week extension to register the church. But after 3 weeks, instead of registering the church, the Service filed an extraordinary appeal with the Court of Appeals. The Court reviewed the appeal and declared that the Service was not allowed to file the appeal, since the case was made against the Government, not the Service. Within a couple of weeks another appeal from the Prime Minister was filed. In early 2004, the appeal was sent to the Supreme Court and was under examination at the end of the period covered by this report. The Church had submitted applications for registration in 1997, 1998, and 2000; the Government rejected these applications on various grounds.

The Mormons have continuously faced bureaucratic obstacles and have not yet obtained registration. They most recently applied for registration in January, and the State Service on Religious Issues requested further documentation in March. There has been no further action taken on their registration request, and the Mormons did not report any resistance or pressure from state authorities.

The State Service on Religious Issues 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 has filed a case against the Government for denying it registration with the European Court of Human Rights, and the case is awaiting review. The Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Moldova filed a complaint locally against the State Service on Religious Issues 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 reexamination. On March 15, the Court of Appeals began reexamining the case. At the end of the period covered by this report, the case was still ongoing. The law provides for restitution to politically repressed or exiled persons of property that was confiscated during the successive Nazi and Soviet regimes. In practice this regulation has been extended to religious communities; however, the Moldovan Orthodox Church 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 among the Moldovan and Bessarabian Churches have not been resolved. The Jewish community has experienced mixed results in its effort to recover its property; however, during the period covered by this report, there were no pending restitution cases for the Jewish community.

The Transnistrian authorities have developed a new textbook that is to be used at all school levels, which reportedly contains negative and defamatory information regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses.

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 have been 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.

In 1997, the authorities in Transnistria announced that they would annul the registration of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Jehovah's Witnesses in Transnistria were originally registered in 1991, and the church was reregistered by the "Ministry of Justice" in 1994 and 1997. However, in 1997 the "President's Commissioner for Religions and Cults" sent official letters to public authorities falsely claiming that the

activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses was banned and that their registration was annulled. Using the "President's Commissioner's" deceptive letter, authorities have repeatedly harassed the Jehovah's Witnesses, including halting the distribution of religious literature and refusing to approve a property request to build a house of worship. In 2001, the Jehovah's Witnesses lodged an official complaint with the "President" of Transnistria, and in 2002, they lodged a complaint with the Magistrate in Tiraspol against illegal actions taken by the "President's Commissioner for Religions and Cults." In July 2002, the "President's Commissioner for Religions and Cults" sent a letter to various government departments with instructions to consider the Jehovah's Witnesses as illegal until the case brought against them had been finalized. The Jehovah's Witnesses have lodged an official complaint and a counter lawsuit against the "President's Commissioner for Religions and Cults." Following several hearings, the Court has decided to suspend the trial until the liquidation case has been finalized. In December 2003, the Jehovah's Witnesses were informed that the two trials would be combined into one trial that would be heard by a panel of three judges. The case was being heard at the close of the period covered by this report.

The Baptist community in Transnistria remains unregistered. In previous years, the Baptists in Transnistria complained of increasing harassment from the authorities; however, during the period covered by this report, the Baptists reported no direct harassment. In addition authorities did not report threats to destroy the group's church, and the group continued to meet in the same building.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Spiritual Organization of Muslims has reported regular harassment by the police. Members say the police often show up at their Friday prayers, which are held at a local Islamic organization's offices, checking participants' documents and taking pictures. On March 5, 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 several cases, members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported being detained and fined for preaching their religion. In the village of Cruzesti, the mayor and residents of the village physically blocked members of Jehovah's Witnesses from the public cemetery for not respecting the customs of the Orthodox religion.

The Jehovah's Witnesses in Transnistria have reported several incidents of administrative fines and unjust arrests of their members. In all reported cases, the charges have been dropped in appeals at the level of the Supreme Court.

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, the adherents of the respective Churches do not interfere with others' freedom to worship.

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 at the instigation of local Orthodox priests.

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.

Between March 14 and March 30, 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, unknown persons attempted to set the Tiraspol synagogue on fire by throwing a Molo-

tov cocktail onto the premises near a local gas supply. The attack failed when passers-by extinguished the fire. Transnistrian authorities believe the attacks were propogated by the same people and claim they are investigating the incidents.

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 Government. During the period covered by this report, an Embassy Officer met with the head of the State Service on Religious Issues highlighting the International Religious Freedom report, which cited discriminatory legislation and policy in the country that disadvantaged certain religions.

The U.S. Ambassador met with leaders of the major religious organizations, including the Moldovan Orthodox Church, Bessarabian Orthodox Church, 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 Moldovan society. The Embassy also funded a project on freedom of religion in post-Soviet societies through the Contemporary Issues Fellowship. In December 2003, the Embassy forwarded copies of Holocaust-related documents provided by the Government to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

An Embassy representative maintains regular contact with religious leaders throughout the country, including in the separatist Transnistria region.

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.

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 a total 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 adhere to 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. Most citizens adhere to Roman Catholicism. 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 7,100 citizens.

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 religious freedom. The Government continues to focus on better integration of Muslims into society following the national debate triggered by the killing in 2002 of a politician who highlighted the issue. However, Muslims are facing continued 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 and corporal punishment. There is also growing anti-Semitism, particularly among Muslims, due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

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 a total area of 16,485 square miles, and its population is approximately 16.2 million. Approximately 31 percent of the population 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.

Society has become increasingly secular. 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 denominations except Islam.

Approximately 26 percent of religious practitioners 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 at least once every 2 weeks.

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. Approximately 60 percent of citizens claim adherence to a religion. However, the beliefs and practices of many of these adherents have developed into what some describe as a selective approach to religion, accepting the positive but not the negative aspects of a particular religion. 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 to join) newer or nonorthodox religious movements, such as Pentecostal groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, Theosophy, or Anthroposophy.

In the wake of secularization since 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. Other Protestant denominations include Baptists, Lutherans, and Remonstrants. In April, the main Protestant churches merged into the United Protestant Churches. However, a few orthodox communities refused to merge.

The country has a long tradition of providing shelter to non-Christian religions. For example, the present Jewish community includes fewer than 25,000 active members but is thriving and operates its own schools.

The number of Muslims continues to rise steadily primarily due to Turkish and Moroccan immigrants marrying partners from their countries of origin. By the end of 2003, there were approximately 295,000 Moroccans and 341,000 Turks in the country. Additional Muslims came from the former colony of Suriname. In the past decade, Muslim numbers further increased due to the large numbers of asylum seekers from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia. By the end of 2003, the total number of Muslims amounted to about 920,000, or 5.7 percent of the population; the majority are Sunni. 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.

There is a sizable community of approximately 95,000 Hindus, of whom 85 percent originally came from Suriname and about 10 percent from India. The country also hosts smaller numbers of Hindus from Uganda, as well as similar movements based on 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 to public as well as to religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and religious health care facilities, irrespective of their religious affiliation. In order to qualify for funding, institutions must meet strict nonreligious-based criteria for curriculum standards, minimum size, and health care.

Religious groups are not required to register with the government; however, the law does recognize 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 minority views to be 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 attempts to exercise influence over the approximately 100 Moroccan mosques through a federation of Moroccan friendship societies. Authorities have not been pleased with 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 and reject appeals by foreign imams to keep sexually mature girls under the age of 16 at home either through action by the school administration or direct communication with parents.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. To counter undesired foreign influence, the authorities have proposed training imams who practice in the country so that they will have at least basic knowledge of the national language and of the country's prevailing norms and social values. Given the strict separation between the State and religion, the authorities themselves cannot organize such training. Although various institutions such as the Islamic University of Rotterdam and the Protestant Free University of Amsterdam teach Islam, no institution provides comprehensive training for imams because the various Islamic organizations disagree on the desirability and modalities of such training; financing also is a problem. As an interim measure, the Government has decided that all imams and other spiritual leaders recruited in Islamic countries first must follow a 1-year integration course before they are allowed to practice in the country.

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 condemned 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 headscarf issue. 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. However, in March 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 has 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 March 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 have both promoted the Jewish cause and reached out to the Islamic community. However, in the fall of 2001, widespread societal resentment of 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.

Individual Muslims occasionally face harassment and threats. Muslims also face 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. Although politicians generally refrain from anti-Islamic rhetoric, members of the Muslim immigrant community have criticized the perceived tendency of both some politicians and the media to characterize Muslims as criminals and backward religious fanatics.

The escalating conflict between Israel and the Palestinians also caused a backlash in society. Several monitoring organizations observed an increase in anti-Semitic incidents. Most anti-Semitic incidents were not violent and included abusive language, hate mail, shouted insults at soccer matches, Internet "chat room" discussions, as well as persistent historical revisionism (such as Holocaust denial). However, pockets of militant young Muslims, mostly Moroccans, on a number of occasions have assaulted or intimidated identifiable Jews. The Center for Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI) observed a continued rise in anti-Semitic incidents in 2002–03, particularly assaults, intimidation, and verbal attacks, perpetrated mostly by Moroccan youths; however, there were no serious attacks on synagogues or Jewish institutions or shops. In addition to the anti-Semitic acts carried out by a relatively small group of Arab youths, the virulent anti-Israel sentiment among certain groups in society, such as the Arab European League and the Stop the Occupation movement, also have contributed to an anti-Semitic atmosphere.

Reacting to CIDI reports on increasing anti-Semitism in recent years, the Parliament requested that the Government present an action plan to combat anti-Semitism in June 2003. It responded in October 2003, but the action plan was placed in the broader context of the Government's unabated efforts to combat discrimination of all kinds, and it did not propose new policy specifically designed to combat anti-Semitism. The plan proposed that 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 April 2003 to ensure proper attention to incidents of discrimination. Measures were also taken to deal more effectively with discrimination on the Internet. 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 Jewish persons in World War II. The Ministry of Welfare subsidizes a special program to teach children about the Second World War and the persecution of Jewish persons. 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 Jewish persons and Muslims.

The labor federations have been working to include in collective bargaining agreements stipulations that permit non-Christian employees to take leave on non-Chris-

tian religious holidays. Such stipulations now have been included in most agreements.

The March report of the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) on Anti-Semitism in the European Union in 2002–03 also noted the CIDI data and, as a result, listed the country as one with a rising problem of anti-Semitism. In April, the Anti-Defamation League issued a survey on attitudes towards Jews, Israel, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 10 European countries that showed that the country scored lowest on the point of holding anti-Semitic views, although its score was higher than 2 years previously; it also scored second on the list as the most pro-Israel nation.

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. Promoting religious freedom around the world is a high-priority goal of the U.S. Government's foreign policy. The U.S. Embassy works very closely with the Government to promote religious freedom. It also engages in dialogue with Muslim and Jewish organizations.

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 a total 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 (153,104; 3.4 percent of the population), Muslims (75,761; 1.6 percent), and Roman Catholics (44,153; 1 percent). Buddhists, Jews, Orthodox, Sikhs, and Hindus are present in very small numbers, together comprising well under 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 69,652 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 6 percent of the population (roughly 273,000 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 review 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 on a proportional basis in accordance with 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 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 February 2002, the Humanist Association appealed the case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg; the case remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In the past, Muslims have encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where they are concentrated. Since 1975 the town council in Drammen had regularly turned down applications to build a mosque. However, during the period covered by this report, 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, Azerbaijan, and Indonesia among other countries. 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.

Jewish persons have reported a doubling of anti-Semitic incidents in the last 2 years. 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 Jewish persons. There were no reports of anti-Semitic violence or vandalism.

The Government is vigilant in fighting anti-Semitism and promoting religious tolerance. In April 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. 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; however, skinheads and other marginal elements of society continued to carry out sporadic incidents of harassment and violence against Jewish persons and occasional desecration of Jewish and, more frequently, Catholic cemeteries.

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 a total area of 120,725 square miles, and its population is an estimated 39 million. More than 96 percent of citizens are Roman Catholic; however, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and much smaller Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim congregations meet freely.

According to the 2003 Annual Statistical Yearbook of Poland, the following figures represent the formal membership of the listed religious groups but not the number of actual persons in those religious communities; for example, the actual number of Jewish persons in the country 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 counted 34,312,707 Roman Catholics, 509,700 Orthodox Church members, 82,000 Greek Catholics, 124,294 members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 79,050 Lutherans (Augsburg), 24,158 Old Catholic Mariavits, 21,938 members of the Polish Catholic Church, 20,376 Pentecostals, 9,484 Seventh-day Adventists, 4,537 Baptists, 5,142 members of the New Apostolic Church, 109 members of Muslim associations, 895 Hare Krishnas, 4,380 Methodists, 3,413 members of the Church of Christ, 3,570 Lutherans (Reformed), 2,490 Catholic Mariavits, and 1,150 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.

According to a 2001 poll, approximately 58 percent of citizens actively participate in religious ceremonies at least weekly. In a 1999 poll, 8 percent of respondents declared that they have no contact with the Catholic Church, an estimated 34 percent declared that they attend church irregularly, and approximately 3 percent declared themselves to be nonbelievers. The survey also found women to be more religious than men, with 64 percent of women attending church regularly, compared with 52 percent of men. Farmers are the most religious occupational group, with 69 percent attending church regularly. No figures are available on the number of atheists.

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 three-year prison term.

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 139 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.

Religious communities may register with the Government; however, they are not required to do so and may function freely without registration. According to 1998 regulations, registration requires that the group submit the names of at least 100 members as well as other information regarding the group. This information on membership must be confirmed by a notary public, although the registration itself often appears to be a formality. In September 2003, an independent Jewish Gmina ("starozakonni") was registered with the Ministry of the Interior. 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.

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. While children are supposed to have the choice between religious instruction and ethics, the Ombudsman's office states that in most schools ethics courses are not offered due to financial constraints. Although Catholic Church representatives teach the vast majority of religious classes in the schools, parents may request religious classes in any of the legally registered religions, 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 Government for teaching religion in public schools. Catholic Church representatives are included on a commission that determines whether books qualify for school use.

Catholic 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 regulating relations between the Government and the Vatican signed in 1993, 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 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 generally good relations with international Jewish groups, and the Orthodox Church reports satisfaction with government action to return claimed property. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is largely responsible for coordinating relations between the Government and these organizations, although President Aleksander Kwasniewski 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. 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, 2,640 of the 3,060 claims filed by the Church had been concluded, with 1,336 claims settled by agreement between the Church and the party in possession of the property (usually the national or a local government), 900 properties returned through decision of the Commission on Property Restitution, which rules on disputed claims; and 536 claims rejected. Claims by the local Jewish community, whose deadline for filing claims under the 1997 law expired in May 2002, number 5,544. The Commission on Property Restitution considered 534 cases, of which 194 were settled amicably and 238 properties were restored. The Lutheran Church, for which the filing deadline was July 1996, filed claims for 1,200 properties. Of these, 780 cases were heard, 220 of which were resolved amicably. A total of 120 claims were filed with the Commission for the Orthodox Church, of which 94 were closed.

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 over several years, buildings and residences were built on land that included Jewish cemeteries destroyed during or after World War II. During the period covered by this report, the Government and local authorities restituted one such property, the Slubice Jewish Cemetery, and progress has been made toward resolution of other claims.

The Government cooperates with the country's nongovernmental organizations (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 June the Government held a major international conference to unveil its proposal to open an international center for human rights education in Oswiecim.

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 2002 the Government closed the department; however, an employee of the Interior Ministry's Public Order Department continues to monitor religious movements.

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; however, skinheads and other marginal elements of society continued to carry out sporadic incidents of harassment and violence against Jewish persons and occasional desecration of Jewish and, more often, Catholic cemeteries.

Orthodox religious officials reported claims of discrimination toward 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 an attitude in the local press in some areas depicting Catholicism as necessary for true citizenship.

In June the National Remembrance Institute (IPN) concluded its investigation of the circumstances surrounding the 1941 massacre of the Jewish population in Jedwabne. The IPN determined that there were at least 340 victims in the Jedwabne killings, and that approximately 40 citizens committed the murders. The official investigation concluded after three years without finding sufficient evidence to charge any of the surviving perpetrators, some of whom had been sentenced in trials in the late 1940s.

Authorities closed the 2002 cases of desecration of tombstones in Czeladz and in a Jewish cemetery in Wroclaw, as well as the investigation by Katowice authorities into the 2001 anti-Semitic, anti-European Union demonstration by approximately 400 Polish ultranationalists, without finding the perpetrators.

Anti-Semitic feelings persist among certain sectors of the population, occasionally manifesting themselves in acts of vandalism and physical or verbal abuse. However, surveys over the past several years show a continuing decline in anti-Semitic sentiment, and avowedly anti-Semitic candidates have won few elections. In December 2003, a group of Catholics protested what they considered to be anti-Semitic literature sold in a bookstore in the basement of a Warsaw church. The group called for church authorities to close the bookstore, which was run by a private company renting the basement space, and for state authorities to prosecute the bookstore owner for hate crimes. The state prosecutors office examined the case and found no basis for prosecution, while Catholic Church authorities stated that they could not take action due to the bookstore's lease.

Sporadic and isolated incidents of harassment and violence against Jewish persons continue to occur, often generated by 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 13th March of the Living took place on April 19. An estimated 6,000 to 7,000 participants walked from the former Auschwitz concentration camp to the former Birkenau death camp to honor victims of the Holocaust. Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Tommy Lapid and Israel's former Chief Rabbi Meir Lau delivered speeches. Schoolchildren, Boy Scouts, the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society, Polish survivors of Auschwitz, and the Polish Union of Jewish Students participated in the march.

On June 3, a memorial was dedicated at the site of the Belzec death camp, where Nazis murdered approximately 500,000 Jewish persons during the Holocaust. The Government, working together with the U.S. Jewish community and the United States Holocaust Museum, constructed the memorial.

There is some public concern about the growth of groups perceived to be "sects" and the influence of nonmainstream religious groups, especially during the summer travel season when young persons travel to camps and other gatherings. Articles have appeared in the press and on the Internet reporting the involvement of "sects" in disappearances.

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 interest to both groups, 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. In June, the Fourth Annual Muslim Cultural Days conference was held in Gdansk.

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 and U.S. Consulate General Krakow continue to monitor closely issues relating to religious freedom and interfaith relations, including Polish-Jewish relations. Embassy and Consulate officers meet frequently with representatives of religious communities, the Government, and local authorities on such matters as property restitution, skinhead 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 also work to facilitate the protection and return of former Jewish cemeteries. During the period covered by this report, an international foundation overseeing restitution of Jewish communal property, founded in 2002 with Embassy support, began participating successfully in communal property restitution.

Embassy and Consulate representatives, including the Ambassador, also regularly meet with representatives of major religious communities, both in the capital and during travels throughout the country. Consulate officials attend events, monitor de-

velopments, and facilitate official visits to the Auschwitz Museum, which is located near Krakow. Consulate officers also maintain contact with and attend events associated with the Orthodox, Protestant and Muslim minorities in the consular district.

The Embassy and the Consulate in Krakow provided continuing support for activities designed to promote cultural and religious tolerance. Those activities included providing press and public affairs support for the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation's education project in Oswiecim, and support to the annual NGO-sponsored "Days of Tolerance" in Kolobrzeg that brings together youth of various religious and ethnic backgrounds and from many countries. The majority of events conducted in Krakow's "Bridges to the East" featured 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 a total area of 35,672 square miles, and the population as of July 2003 was estimated to be 10.3 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 Evangelists) 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 about 7,000 persons, which largely traces its origins to South Asians who emigrated from Portuguese Africa and the former Portuguese colony of Goa in India. Many of these minority communities are not organized formally.

Government estimates suggest that there are over 200,000 immigrants from Eastern European countries in the country. Over half of these immigrants are from the 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, passed in April 2001, created a legislative framework for religions established in the country for at least 30 years, or those recognized internationally for at least 60 years. The act provides qualifying religions with benefits previously reserved for the Catholic Church: Full tax-exempt status; legal rec-

ognition for marriage and other rites; chaplain visits to prisons and hospitals; and respect for traditional holidays. It allows for 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 enabling this legislation took effect in December 2003; however, no group has 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 1940 terms of the Concordat. To comply constitutionally with the Religious Freedom Act, the Government negotiated with the Vatican and signed the new amended Concordat on May 18. This document abrogates the previous Concordat, which had been in force for 64 years but was considered obsolete given the changes in national life. As of the end of the reporting period, the new Concordat was scheduled to be approved by Parliament on July 8; it then must be approved by the President of the Republic. 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. The revised Concordat also provides for the civil recognition of a non-consummated canonical marriage. These are cases in which, as the Code of Canon Law establishes, there has been no sacramental marriage, despite the fact that a ceremony took place.

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 243 classes in schools during the 2002–03 school year. Under the 2001 Act, each religion may approve the course's respective instructors.

The Government is in the process of establishing 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 will be led by a Government-appointed chairman and will consist primarily of teachers who, by the nature of their jobs, have professional experience in this area; however, it had not begun operation during the period covered by this report.

Under the Concordat, major Catholic holidays also are official holidays. Seven of the country's 16 national holidays are Catholic holidays.

The Diocese of Leiria-Fatima is no longer seeking funding to establish a cable television station. Currently, it is broadcasting 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 (Radiotelevisao 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 City Hall 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. The municipality of Lisbon also provides the 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.

In October 2003, during the Interfaith Congress held at the Catholic shrine of Fµtima, representatives of the world's leading religions explored the possibility of opening the shrine to a variety of faiths. The first steps in developing Fµtima as a multifaith center were taken on May 5 when a Hindu religious service was held in the Chapel of the Apparitions at the shrine. Although some disagreed with the practice of non-Catholic rituals inside the sanctuary, reactions to opening the shrine to other religions were highly positive.

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 in 2003 focused on Judaism. The Aristides de Sousa Mendes Foundation, 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, has sponsored a number of events, including a ceremony presided over by the Archbishop of Lisbon on June 15 at the Lisbon Cathedral in honor of de Sousa Mendes. A parallel ceremony was held at the Lisbon Mosque. Manuela Franco, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, addressed a seminar on the history of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki in November 2003. The Jewish heritage was honored in February at a ceremony in Covilha, marking the production and distribution of a new kosher wine. The event was attended by government officials and received significant media coverage.

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 gov-

ernment officials impede their efforts at proselytizing and interfere 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 pose obstacles to minority religions. The Government made no further effort to adopt a new law regulating religions, and there are no prospects for the submission of such a draft law to Parliament in the near future. The Government still has not passed legislation to return to the Greek Catholic community churches and church property transferred by the communists to the Orthodox Church in 1948, nor has it shown any inclination to do so. Following controversial remarks in July 2003 by President Iliescu regarding the Holocaust, an international commission headed by Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel was set up in October 2003 to study the Holocaust in the country, and in May the Government declared that the Holocaust will be commemorated annually on October 9. In March Parliament passed a law that lays the groundwork to return properties confiscated from the Jewish community by the pro-Nazi government between 1940 and 1945. The process of granting construction permits for places of worship continued, but some minority religions continued to complain of lengthy delays.

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups; however, the Romanian Orthodox Church has shown some hostility toward non-Orthodox religious churches and criticized the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church repeatedly has described as "sects." The Orthodox Church continues to oppose 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, in particular of Greek Catholic Churches, with government officials. The need to expand Holocaust education was discussed with government officials by the U.S. Embassy and the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues. The U.S. Embassy continues to encourage government and religious leaders to respect religious freedom fully.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total 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 May 2003). Members of other faiths worship freely, but are not afforded various forms of state support.

According to the March 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 number over 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 there are approximately 10,200 members. Muslims numbered 67,257. 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.

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 denominations in the country; however, they are not recognized officially.

According to a nationwide poll conducted in October 2003, 1 percent of those polled said they go to church on a daily basis; 3 percent said they attend church several times per week; 20 percent stated they go to church once a week; 23 percent claim to go several times per month; 33 percent attend services only on Christmas, Easter, and other religious holidays; 11 percent go to church once a year or less; and 7 percent do not go to church at all. The same poll shows that 85 percent of citizens say that 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 under laws and decrees. The Orthodox Church exercises substantial influence in its dominant role among a majority of the population and policymakers, including the commission for construction of new places of worship. 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 Supreme Court ruling in 2000 that ordered that Jehovah's Witnesses be recognized, and after repeated interventions by the U.S. Embassy and others, the Government granted Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a recognized religion in May 2003. Jehovah's Witnesses is the first religious group to gain this status since 1989, with the exception of the Greek Catholic Church, which was reestablished after the fall of communism.

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 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. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations reported that it 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.

In December 2002, a government decision on local taxes carried a list of the 16 (at that time) officially recognized religions, which had a negative effect on unrecognized religions with regard to taxes on places of worship; unrecognized religions are now required to pay annual taxes on these buildings. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses, at the time not formally recognized, were asked in several communities to pay retroactive property taxes on places of worship. Jehovah's Witnesses refused to pay the taxes since they had received a court ruling recognizing their religion in 2000 although the Government did not recognize them officially until 2003. During the period covered by this report, there was no resolution of the dispute.

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, in the registration process. In January 2003, the Government reintroduced mandatory approval by the State Secretariat for the registration of religious associations. As a result of these procedures, the State Secretariat issued 35 approvals in 2003 and 30 in the first half of the year. Five associations and foundations notified the State Secretariat in 2003 and the first half of the year of their previous registration. The State Secretariat approved the change of statutes of four religious associations and foundations in 2003 and five in the first half of the year. The applications for 20 other religious groups remained pending on various grounds; however, 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 2003 the Government allocated funds amounting to almost $6.9 million (ROL 228,805 million) to the Orthodox Church, approximately $400,000 (ROL 13,270 million) to the Roman Catholic Church, close to $127,000 (ROL 4,210 million) to the Greek Catholic Church, and approximately $98,000,000 (ROL 3,265 million) to the Reformed Church for the construction and repair of churches.

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 Denominations, evidence that the applicants represent a religious organization legally established in the country, medical insurance, and a criminal record review. To grant this approval, in May the ministry asked religious groups to provide religious workers' professional history, 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. Some religious groups expressed concern that these requirements would delay issuance of visas and residency permits. The law no longer limits visa extensions to 6 months, a provision considered positive by most religious groups. 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 approximately 950 visas and visa extensions were approved for religious workers in 2003, and 325 were approved in the first 6 months of the year.

In November 2003, the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations issued new regulations for the organization and operation of the commission in charge of issuing construction permits for places of worship. The new regulations, like the old legislation, define places of worship as "buildings such as churches, houses of prayer, temples, mosques, synagogues, and houses of assembly, used by religious denominations, religious associations and foundations for their specific religious services." The regulations were modified in December 2003 by the Government to eliminate the representative of the Orthodox Church from the composition of the 11-member commission. Previously, the Orthodox Church was the only religious organization represented on the commission. There were no reports that the commission denied any applications for construction permits; however, there were reports of lengthy delays.

The Government subsequently made no further progress toward adopting a new religion law. Minority religious groups are not optimistic about the adoption of a law on religious denominations in the near future due to ongoing Greek Catholic-Orthodox tensions and pressure by the Orthodox Church to be declared the national church. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations has suggested that a long-pending draft religion law may be submitted to Parliament in 2005.

Minority religious groups assert that central government and parliamentary officials are more cooperative than local officials. Specifically, relations with the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations have continued to improve.

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, along with religious denominations and local authorities, sponsored a training course for monastery and church staff; a series of symposiums with ecumenical participation in Bucharest, Durau (Neamt County), Selimbar (Sibiu County), Sibiu, and Cluj; and a conference in Bucharest on religious freedom and interconfessional relations in light of European integration, cosponsored with the Bern-based International Association for the Defense of Religious Freedom. In order to foster a permanent dialogue in religious life, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations has meetings with representatives of religious groups on a regular basis and attended the meetings of the leading bodies of some religious denominations, for example, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church and the Congress of the Baptist Church.

The National Anti-Discrimination Council, established to curb discrimination of any kind (including on religious grounds), received 12 complaints of discrimination on religious grounds in 2003, and 2 in the first 4 months of this year.

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.

Most mainstream politicians have criticized anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia publicly. President Ion Iliescu, Prime Minister Adrian Nastase, and several members of the cabinet (the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Culture and Religious Denominations, and others) continued to make public statements on various occasions against extremism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, and criticize attempts to deny the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country. During the period covered by this report, the Government sponsored several seminars and symposiums on anti-Semitism. Two government-issued decrees aimed at combating 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 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 of the localities where the street name has not been changed is Cluj, where the mayor, a member of the extremist Greater Romania Party, has repeatedly opposed the change. A street with this name still exists in Targu Mures. In May 2003, the Government inaugurated a Holocaust memorial in Targu Mures, a Transylvanian town under Hungarian administration in World War II. In October 2003, within the framework of a project on the Cultural Heritage of Jews in Romania, the national Government, the U.S. Embassy, the NGO Civic Education, and the University of Bucharest's Goldstein Goren Center for Hebrew Studies supported an international seminar, organized by the Jewish Communities Federation in Romania and B'nai B'rith International. The seminar also inaugurated the launch of a digital archive of historical Jewish places in the country.

Introduced only recently in some school curriculums and at the National Defense College, education on the country's role in the Holocaust is still limited. There is no unitary approach to teaching the Holocaust. Textbooks used are not consistent in their description of events. However, in October 2003, the Government established an international commission headed by Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel and consisting of 30 Romanian and foreign historians to study the Holocaust. The findings of the commission, which will have full access to archives and other documents, will be included in the school curriculum. History teachers participated in training courses for the teaching of the Holocaust in Paris (November), Cluj (May–September), and Bucharest in the fall of 2003 and again in May. The Ministry of Education distributed books on the Holocaust in schools throughout the reporting period. Over 50 teachers have graduated from the training program at the Holocaust teaching center in Bacau, which was established with the support of the Ministry of Education in 2002.

On May 20, 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 June 2003, on the occasion of the approval of the agreement between the U.S.-based Holocaust Memorial Museum and Romania's National

Archives, the Government issued a communique that denied the occurrence of a Holocaust within its borders. Faced with domestic and international criticism, the Government issued a second communiqué, a few days after the first, admitting that the pro-Nazi regime had committed serious war crimes against the Jews and assumed responsibility for the participation of the country's former rulers in the Holocaust. In a July 2003 interview with the Israeli newspaper "Ha'aretz," President Ion Iliescu downplayed the Jewish Holocaust in Europe, saying that it "was not unique to the Jews" and other nationalities had also suffered. The President also said that court cases involving restitution of Jewish properties should be either postponed or rejected because the country is too poor to return them or pay compensation. Following vehement domestic and foreign criticism, the President's Executive Office claimed that Iliescu's statements were misinterpreted and became actively involved in the establishment of the Wiesel Commission and the Holocaust Remembrance Day.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center criticized the Government in its annual report for 2003 for its refusal to cancel 1-year-old court rulings pardoning two war criminals that participated in the extermination of Jews in Bessarabia and Bucovina.

In May, following the recommendation of the Wiesel Commission, the Government established a Holocaust Remembrance Day on October 9.

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 due to its substantial influence. Local officials tend to be tolerant, but they often are pressured and intimidated by Orthodox clergy. According to one official of the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, such cases are caused by personal feuds at the local level and overly aggressive attitudes by minority religious groups toward the Orthodox Church. In some instances, local police and administrative authorities tacitly supported societal campaigns (some of which were violent) against proselytizing.

Representatives of religious groups that sought recognition after 1990 allege 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 are some of the religious groups that have tried unsuccessfully to register as religions. Local leaders of the Baha'i Faith stated that, during the period covered by the report, they renewed their attempt to seek registration with only negative response. After a prolonged delay, during which the U.S. Embassy made repeated representations, the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations enforced a 2000 court ruling ordering recognition of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religion in May 2003.

One explanation given by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations for a 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 is not possible. While this argument appears to have been overtaken by the Supreme Court's demand that Jehovah's Witnesses be recognized, the confusing set of laws governing recognition impeded the process.

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.

Religious minorities, including the Greek Catholic Church, the Catholic Church, and the Baha'i Faith, made credible allegations of irregularities during the 2002 census. These irregularities included numerous alleged incidents where census takers did not note accurately minority religions on census forms by failing to ask, positively suggesting the dominant faith, or even refusing to mark minority affiliations.

In addition representatives of several minority religious groups complain 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 depending on the needs of the various religious denominations. Over the years, the Government has constructed a large number of Orthodox churches. Some

minority religious groups also continued to complain that Orthodox churches were built with government support in areas without Orthodox believers.

While most minority religions reported that they received permits to build places of worship without any difficulty, some made credible complaints that the regulations generated delays in the process. According to reports by the Jehovah's Witnesses, although their requests for permits were approved by central authorities, their intention to build places of prayer have been obstructed at the local level, such as in Bals (Olt County) and Feldioara (Brasov County), where the mayors refused to issue the construction permits, and Jehovah's Witnesses had to take the issue to court. A decision in the Bals case still was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. Despite a September 2003 court ruling in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses in Feldioara, the mayor continued to refuse to issue 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 has denied the permit repeatedly since the land purchase in 2000.

In 2003 the Commission approved 197 applications for the construction of places of worship. Of the 197 permits, 102 were granted to the Orthodox Church, 6 to the Catholic Church, 14 to the Greek Catholic Church, 3 to the Reformed Church, 12 to the Baptist Church, 7 to the Pentecostal Church, 11 to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 30 to Jehovah's Witnesses, and the rest to other religions. In the first 4 months of the year, the commission issued 50 permits: 31 to the Orthodox Church; 1 to the Catholic Church; 4 to the Greek Catholic Church; 4 to the Baptist Church; 4 to the Pentecostal Church; 2 to the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and 4 to Jehovah's Witnesses. By the end of the period covered by this report, 10 applications were pending submission of additional data.

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 its religious programs, for example, in Dragomiresti (Vaslui County). Although Jehovah's Witnesses were granted religion status, a large number of mayors continued to demand taxes for land and places of worship. Thirteen lawsuits regarding taxes are currently in progress following Jehovah's Witnesses' complaints. In Saliste (Sibiu County), the mayor forbade Jehovah's Witnesses from developing any local activity, accusing them of proselytizing.

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, minority recognized religious groups complain that they have been unable to have classes offered in their faith in public schools. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Greek Catholic 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. Religious teachers are permitted to instruct only students of the same religious faith. However, minority religious groups, including the Greek Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses, credibly asserted that there were cases of children pressured to attend classes of Orthodox religion. The Baptist Church complained that inspectorates hired Baptist theological high school teaching staffs without asking for the prior approval of the church, despite a protocol to this effect signed by the Church and the Ministry of Education in September 2000.

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 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 June 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 4 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, following an agreement between the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR).

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 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. 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; Mosaic cult, 1,809; Evangelical Church, 690; other denominations, 201. The national commission for Law 501 started its activity in June 2003 and restituted 70 buildings that month. The process continued at more or less regular intervals, and the commission restituted an additional 479 buildings during the reporting period.

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, 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 over 270 of the churches transferred by the Communists to the Orthodox Church; however, the Greek Catholics claim that they have received only 176 such properties. The Greek Catholic Church has very few places of worship. Many followers still are compelled to hold services in public places (over 353 cases, according to Greek Catholic reports) or in the open. For example, Greek Catholic parishioners continue to worship in a local park in Rosia Montana, where local authorities did not enforce a final court ruling, dating from 2002, returning the Greek Catholic church, parish house, and cemetery. Similar situations were reported in at least two other localities. 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 have not been restituted), no further progress has been 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 have given up smaller country churches voluntarily. For example, 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 have refused to return churches to the Greek Catholics. Between July 2003 and April, the Greek Catholic Church recovered 30 churches, an improvement over the previous year, but only a small percentage of the approximately 2,000 churches outstanding.

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, due to his actions, the Orthodox Holy Synod marginalized Archbishop Corneanu, and his fellow clergymen criticized him.

A 1990 government decree called for the creation of a joint Orthodox and Greek Catholic committee at the national level to decide the fate of churches that had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church before 1948. The Government did not enforce

the decree until 1998, when the committee met for the first time. It had three meetings in 1999, and it has met annually since 2000, but the Orthodox Church resisted efforts to resolve the problem in this forum. The courts generally refuse to consider Greek Catholic lawsuits seeking restitution, citing the 1990 decree establishing the joint committee to resolve the issue. 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. Only 15 churches have been restituted as the result of the joint committee's meetings. 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.

At the most recent meeting of the joint committee in Baia Mare on September 23, 2003, the Greek Catholic Church reiterated its core claim: 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 had belonged to the Greek Catholics. The Orthodox Church in turn stressed 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 also called for an end of all ongoing lawsuits and emphasized that the construction of new churches is the only solution to existing conflicts. The next meeting of the national joint committee is scheduled for September 2004.

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), and Craiova (Dolj County). A church in Urca (Cluj County) was demolished in August–September 2003. Another church threatened with demolition is in Ungheni (Mures County). In this instance, the Orthodox Church resumed construction for a new church during the period covered by this report; the new church is 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). Moreover, the Government allocated sizeable funds to the Orthodox construction site. Over a number of years, the Orthodox Church has repeatedly rejected the Greek Catholic requests for alternating service in a total of 227 localities. Following increasing tensions in some localities, the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations called and mediated a meeting of the two churches in April 2002. The Minister of Culture announced at the meeting the Government's intention to help the Greek Catholic Church build 50 wooden churches, a solution that does not satisfy fully Greek Catholic Church claims. No churches had been built by the end of the period covered by this report.

The national commission for the restitution of religious property according to Law 501/2002 returned 53 of the 2,207 reclaimed buildings to the Greek Catholic Church to date.

In February 2002, the Orthodox Patriarch in a letter to the Minister of Justice described court rulings in favor of the Greek Catholic Church as "illegal" and "abusive" and stated that decisions on such cases should be made only by the joint Orthodox-Greek Catholic committee. The Minister of Justice distributed the letter to all Courts of Appeal and asked for its careful consideration.

In October 2002, Greek Catholic believers from the country and throughout the world addressed a memorandum to the President, Premier, 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 authorities did not respond to this memorandum.

An earlier appeal by the Pope in June 2002 for the restitution of Catholic properties, as well as a letter sent by the Greek Catholic Archbishop later that month for a restitution law regarding Greek Catholic churches, remain unanswered. Local and state authorities also ignored letters and appeals complaining about discrimination of the Church, sent by Greek Catholic bishops and priests in December 2003 and in January and February. The authorities did not respond to street protests by Greek Catholics in October 2003.

Even when courts accept lawsuits regarding Greek Catholic churches, in many cases restitution was not granted. For example, in March 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.

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. Hungarian churches registered 27 of them in the official real estate book. Of these buildings, they could take possession of fewer than 20. Restitution of the remainder has been delayed due to lawsuits or opposition from current possessors. For example, restitution under Decree 13 of 1998 of the Batthyanaeum Library (which had belonged to the Roman Catholic Church) has been delayed by lawsuits. Despite a December 2003 court ruling in favor of the Roman Catholic Church, the building has not been restituted. The church filed a complaint early this year. No further progress has been made in the restitution of the Roman Catholic Bishop's Palace in Oradea, which was partially restituted in June 2003, according to a protocol between a local museum, its current user, and the Roman Catholic Bishopric. The Minister of Culture and Religious Denominations stated in 2001 that he is opposed to restitution of these properties, despite the court rulings. To date the national commission for religious property restitution according to Law 501/2002 has restituted 340 of the 1,450 reclaimed buildings to the Hungarian Churches.

The Jewish community has received 42 buildings by government decree. Of these structures, the community has taken actual, partial, or full possession of 29 buildings. The community has been able to reclaim land only in Iasi, where it received 15 pieces of land (of former synagogues and schools) between 1999 and 2000. Under Law 501/2002, 38 additional buildings were returned to the Jewish community during the period covered by this report.

At the beginning of March, Parliament adopted a law amending a previous government decree, which restituted a limited number of properties to ethnic communities, including the Jewish community. The new 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. Under the law, claims for restitution may be submitted until September 30. 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.

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. The Reformed College in Cluj, returned to the Reformed Church by government decree in 1999, had to pay property taxes without receiving any rent from its user, Gheorghe Sincai High School. The building eventually was partially returned to the Reformed Church in December 2002.

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. This is the first law that establishes a systematic procedure for churches to claim land; however, enforcement continues to be slow.

Amendments to the Constitution enacted in October 2003 allow the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the State.

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 toReligious Freedom

In October 2003, after a year of controversy over government statements and presidential remarks regarding the Holocaust, the Government established an international commission to study the Romanian Holocaust and make recommendations for expanding Holocaust education. The commission, which is expected to release its first report in November, is headed by Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel. In March

Parliament adopted a law to restitute communal properties, including those confiscated from members of the Jewish community by the pro-Nazi government between 1940 and 1945. In May the Government established a Holocaust Remembrance Day, to be observed every October 9.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups. However, the Romanian Orthodox Church repeatedly has criticized strongly the so-called "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church repeatedly has described as "sects." There is no law against proselytizing, or any clear understanding of what activities constitute proselytizing. Proselytizing that involves denigrating established churches is perceived as provocative. This has led to conflicts in some cases. The press 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) repeatedly harassed verbally and sometimes physically Mormons in several cities around the country. In July 2003, "New Right" members picketed an open house meeting in Bucharest. The police intervened to protect the meeting. In 2001 Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) regarding the sentencing of six of its members from Mizil to pay fines on charges of insult and assault in a trial initiated by persons linked with the Orthodox Church in 2000. The ECHR's decision remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

The centuries-long domination of the Orthodox Church, along with its status as the majority religion, has resulted in the Orthodox Church's reluctance, in particular at the local level and with the support of low-level officials, to accept the existence of 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 allege that some members of the Orthodox clergy have provoked isolated mob incidents. The Adventist Church reported an incident at Fetesti (Iasi County) in November 2003, when the Orthodox priest and the mayor incited the population to bury a deceased Adventist following Orthodox rites, acting forcibly against the wishes of the family.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses continue 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) in April. In many cases, including Covasna (Covasna County) and Dofteana (Bacau County) in April, the police either did not intervene in such incidents or, under the influence of Orthodox priests, reacted negatively to Jehovah's Witnesses' complaints. In Covasna the police reportedly attempted to intimidate Jehovah's Witnesses to stop their activity.

Tensions with the Orthodox Church reportedly increased in Mizil, a village with a small congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The congregation was subjected to a persistent discrediting campaign by the local Orthodox Church, which sent a letter to the police in April threatening to take measures to stop Jehovah's Witnesses activity unless the police took action. The police initially refused to register a complaint in May by an ordinate Jehovah's Witnesses minister that an Orthodox priest verbally and physically abused him. Jehovah's Witnesses appealed for help from the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations. The Secretariat urged the prefect's office, in an official letter on May 24, to take all necessary steps to guarantee constitutional provisions and to defuse interconfessional tensions. Reportedly, at the end of June, the Jehovah's Witness ordinate minister was summoned to the police station, verbally abused, and threatened by four Orthodox priests and eight Orthodox believers, in the presence of two police officers. The officers failed to protect the minister or prevent the incident from taking place in a public building. Jehovah's Witnesses subsequently wrote a letter of complaint regarding the incident to the Prahova County Police Inspectorate who responded by suggesting Jehovah's Witnesses should take such incidents to court.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported similar incidents with Orthodox priests in several localities, including Anghelesti (Vrancea County) in February and Danciulesti in March (Gorj County). In April in Cervenia and Licurici (Teleorman County), Orthodox priests verbally abused school children participating in the Biblical School courses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Mormons reported that two church missionaries were harassed by an Orthodox priest in Bucharest in October 2003. This religious group encountered similar problems in Iasi and Pitesti be-

tween October 2003 and February. In addition the Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that an Orthodox priest beat a Seventh-day Adventist student during the religion class in Jorasti (Galati County) in March. The school principal refused to discuss the issue with the Adventist priest; reportedly no legal action was taken against the Orthodox priest for the assault.

In January and February, unidentified persons damaged the facade of a new Adventist Church in Girov (Neamt County), and the local police refused to receive the Adventist Church's written complaint. A complaint was filed at the end of February with the county police, but the perpetrators were unidentified at the end of the reporting period.

In June 2003, an Orthodox priest assaulted a Presbyterian priest with a metal cross in Bucecea (Botosani Count). The population and the police took action in favor of the Presbyterian priest; however, the incident was closed without legal action against the Orthodox priest.

During the period covered by this report, Orthodox priests denied the Seventh-day Adventist Church access to bury its deceased members in the cemeteries of Vizantea (Vrancea County), Mihaileni (Botosani County), Vaslui (Vaslui County), Jabenta and Chiherul (Mures County), Horezu (Valcea County), and Cervenia (Teleorman County). In Mihaileni and Jabenta, following pressure by the local authorities, the burials eventually were allowed. In all of these cases, it is not clear whether public or church cemeteries were the subject of the disputes. In order to avoid such encounters, the Adventist Church asked the mayors' offices for land for cemeteries, but during the period covered by this report received positive answers to only 4 of its 500 requests. Orthodox priests also obstructed the burial of Greek Catholic believers in Garbau (Cluj County), Ileanda (Salaj County), Rosia (Sibiu County), Magina (Alba County) and Salistea de Sus (Maramures County).

Representatives of minority religions credibly complain 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 often have been interpreted as proselytizing.

Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic churches has not eliminated disputes at the local level and has led to little real progress in solving the problem of the restitution of the Greek Catholic assets.

Disputes between Greek Catholics and Orthodox believers over church possession increased in number during the period covered by this report. Greek Catholic communities have decided, in many cases, to build new churches due to lack of progress in restituting their properties either through dialogue with the Orthodox Church or in court; however, their efforts have been obstructed by the Orthodox Church, sometimes with the support of local authorities. For example, in Sapinta, the Greek Catholic Church chose not to reclaim its former church and cemetery but rather to construct a new church. In September 2003, the Orthodox priest reportedly prompted the population to stop a meeting of the local council, which should have approved the construction plans of the new Greek Catholic Church. There were similar tensions in Certeze (Satu Mare County), where the Greek Catholic Church was not permitted to build a new church on its land due to 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, for example, Tigvaniul Mare (Caras Severin County), Rosia Montana (Alba County), and Racovita.

In Prunis (Cluj County), where most of the residents belong to the Greek Catholic Church, tensions continue due to a long-standing lawsuit. The Minister of Culture and Religious Denominations mediated an agreement in June 2003, designed to defuse tensions between the Orthodox and the Uniate Churches in Mihalt (Alba County), according to which the Greek Catholic Church should have received government funding to build a new cemetery. However, discord continued in the region, following the Government's allocation in December 2003 of approximately $150,000 (ROL 5 billion) to the Orthodox Church instead of the Greek Catholic Church. In the time that it took to correct the misallocation, approximately 3 months, the Orthodox Church purchased the piece of land the Greek Catholics intended to buy.

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 December 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. Such cases are reported in Pintic, Letca, Boereni, Sanpaul, Lupsa, Singiorzul Nou, and Suciu de Jos. However, 50 Greek Orthodox churches still are closed.

During the period covered by this report, 17 final restitution court rulings in favor of the Greek Catholic Church could not be enforced because of local authorities' lack of cooperation. Moreover, in many cases during the reporting period, local authorities, for example, local police and prefects in Maramures, Satu Mare, Alba, and other counties, repeatedly supported the Orthodox Church in opposing enforcement of such court rulings. The Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations 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 the local Orthodox priest and the mayor continued to refuse to implement Orthodox Archbishop Corneanu's decision to restitute a church to the Greek Catholics.

In Bicsad (Satu Mare County), where the Greek Catholics obtained a government decision restituting a former Greek Catholic monastery, the Greek Catholic Church still could not take possession of the monastery because of opposition from the local Orthodox 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 are dim, since restitution is contingent on construction of a new Orthodox church, which is expected to take many years.

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 inter-war period) continued to publish books from the inter-war period and Iron Guard magazines. A new Iron Guard monthly, "Obiectiv Legionar" (Legionnaire Focus), carrying mostly old legionnaire literature, began publication in July 2003 and is distributed in several of the largest cities, including Bucharest. A contributor to one of these magazines, the Timisoara-based "Gazeta de Vest," was sentenced in July 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 marches to commemorate Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Legionnaire Movement, for example, a march in November 2003. Religious services to commemorate legionnaire leaders continue to be held in Orthodox churches, such as the services commemorating Corneliu Zelea Codreanu in November 2003. In March 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.

Unidentified persons broke into a synagogue in Bacau and broke its windows in March. The perpetrators could not be identified, but are 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 was written on the walls of the Jewish Theater in Bucharest and on downtown buildings in Cluj in October 2002. Perpetrators have not been identified in either case. Thieves broke into the Jewish temple in Vatra Dornei in July 2002. The synagogue in Focsani was desecrated in July 2002. Five Jewish cemeteries were desecrated in 2003. Perpetrators have not been identified in these cases.

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. Embassy staff, including the Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission, political section chief, human rights officer, and USAID and Public Diplomacy officers, regularly met with religious leaders and government officials who work on religious affairs in Bucharest and in other cities.

In July 2003, the Embassy financed the travel of four high school teachers to a course in the United States for teaching the Holocaust and provided books on the Holocaust to the Ministry of Education to use to develop a text and teachers' manual.

In a series of meetings during the period covered by this report, the Ambassador discussed with the Prime Minister, Minister of Education, and Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs the need to ensure that specific, widespread teaching of the Holocaust takes place within the national educational system. The Ambassador offered technical and material assistance to support further development of the curriculum. During a visit to Bucharest in November 2003, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Ambassador Edward O'Donnell, discussed with government officials expanding Holocaust education and ensuring access to archival materials on the Holocaust for historians and other researches.

On repeated occasions, the Ambassador raised the issue of restitution of religious properties, in particular of Greek Catholic churches, with government officials, including the President and Prime Minister. In August 2003, members of the Embassy's Office in Cluj discussed the problems encountered by the Greek Catholic Church in restitution of its churches in some specific cases at a panel on the U.S. and Europe in Tusnad. The Embassy's Office in Cluj focused on similar restitution topics at a conference on the Greek Catholic Church at the Babes-Bolyai University in November 2003, at an ecumenical conference in Cluj in March, and in numerous speeches in schools and universities.

Through SEED funding, and at the Ambassador's direction, USAID cosponsored a project on the Cultural Heritage of Jews in Romania, which included an international seminar in October 2003 and the development of the "Jewish Heritage Trail" computer archive of historic Jewish sites in the country.

In addition Embassy staff members were in frequent contact with numerous nongovernmental organizations that monitor developments in the country's religious life. U.S. officials have lobbied consistently in government circles for fair treatment on property restitution issues, including religious and communal properties, and for nondiscriminatory treatment of all religious groups. The Embassy has worked on the development of interconfessional understanding and broader religious tolerance.

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 some 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 somewhat for minority religious faiths 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," which seriously disadvantages religious groups new to the country, and which had eased somewhat in the period covered by the last report, were cited as the basis for banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow and upheld in the second appeal of the case. There were indications that the security services increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats.

Religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens, although many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is at the heart of what it means to be Russian. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as societal hostility toward Roman Catholics and newer, non-Orthodox religions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it often is difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, 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, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and religions new to the country. Leaders in the ROC have stated publicly their opposition to the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and newer religions.

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, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a steady dialogue on religious freedom. The Embassy and consulates have worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs designed to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. The Embassy maintains a broad range of

contacts in the religious and NGO community via 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 Internal Affairs Ministry (MVD) and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). 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.

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 inhabitants 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. Muslims live predominantly in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, the North Caucasus, and the Volga region. By most estimates, Protestants constitute the third largest group of believers. An estimated 600,000 to 1 million Jews remain in the country (0.5 percent of the total population) following large-scale emigration over the last 2 decades; approximately 80 percent live in Moscow or St. Petersburg. The so-called Jewish Autonomous Oblast, located in the Far East, has between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews. Buddhism is traditional to three regions: Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. In some areas, such as Yakutia and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or alongside majority religions.

According to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), there were 21,664 registered religious organizations as of January 1. 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 (divided among 4 groups), 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 (Mormons)—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 Pentecostals. The Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith estimates that there are 1,600 Pentecostal churches, 62 regional associations, and about 300,000 believers. The official number of registered Pentecostal organizations as of January 1 was 1,467. The difference in numbers can be explained by the fact that many Pentecostal churches remain unregistered.

Some religious groups have registered as social organizations because they were unable to register as religious organizations. The Unification Church reports that the drop in registered organizations from 17 during the previous reporting period, to 10 the period covered by this report, was due to local authorities hindering the Church's attempt to reregister its local organizations. As of January 1, there were no Quaker organizations listed by the MOJ, but the groups may have been categorized under "other faiths," of which there were 216 organizations. The Moscow Monthly Friends' Meeting (Quakers) is an officially registered Quakers' organization.

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 only rarely, or not at all.

A large number of foreign missionaries operate in the country, 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 some 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 law on freedom of religion was adopted in 1990 by the country's Supreme Court and remained the same until a new law was adopted in 1997. 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. The 1990 law helped facilitate a revival of religious activity. In 1997, a supplemental law on religion was passed: The Law on Freedom of Conscience. Although the 1997 law does not recognize a state religion, its preamble identifies Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism as "traditional religions" and recognizes the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture."

Neither the Constitution nor the 1997 law accords explicit privileges or advantages to "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 special access to institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, the Federal Security Service (FSB), and the army.

Many government officials and citizens, equate Russian Orthodoxy with nationhood. This belief appears to have manifested itself in a 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, Interior, and other bodies, such as Emergency Situations, Tax, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces under the President. The details of these agreements are far from transparent, but available information indicates that the ROC appears to receive more favorable treatment than other denominations. Public statements by some government officials and anecdotal evidence from religious minorities suggest that the ROC, increasingly since 1999, has enjoyed a status that approaches official. Election campaign teams often include members of the Russian Orthodox clergy. The clergy frequently plays a special role at official events at both the local and national level. For example, in early 2002, the director of the FSB received Patriarch Aleksiy at the Service's Lubyanka headquarters, where the prelate blessed a church that had been restored. Nonetheless, policymakers remain divided on the State's proper relationship with the ROC and other churches.

The Duma elected in December 2003 contains several staunchly pro-ROC members, although this has not so far been reflected in the legislation taken up by the Duma leadership. The Rodina faction and single-mandate deputies representing the People's Party have already declared their positions as ROC lobbyists. Aleksandr Chuyev, Chairman of the Duma Committee on Public Associations and Religious Organizations Affairs, announced in February that an inter-factional deputies' group, "In Support of Traditional Spiritual and Ethical values of Russia," was to be formed in the State Duma. According to Chuyev, 30 deputies have already expressed their will to join the association. Oleg Yefremov, who was appointed executive secretary of the interfactional group, in an interview emphasized the Duma deputies' extraordinary role in defending traditional values and withstanding various sects. In Yefremov's view, there should be only four traditional religious faiths in the country: Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. No other religions should be allowed. Despite the strength of the ROC lobby in the Duma, no actual legislative moves to strengthen ROC's position have been taken yet.

The President, who has openly spoken of his belief in God, acknowledged Orthodox Easter, Rosh Hashanah, Ramadan, and the Buddhist New Year with greetings to representatives of the ROC, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities, respectively. Some of the country's highest-level officials attended the Orthodox Christmas service, celebrated on January 7, a national holiday, at Christ the Savior Cathedral.

The 1997 law ostensibly targeted so-called "totalitarian sects" or dangerous religious "cults." However, the intent of some of the law's sponsors appears to have been to discriminate against members of foreign and less well-known religions by making it difficult for them to establish religious organizations. For example, 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 literature, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals and among the armed forces. It does not enjoy tax benefits or the right to proselytize. Individual members of the 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 adhering to the 15-year rule.

Under a 1999 amendment to the law, groups that failed to reregister became subject to legal "liquidation," i.e., deprivation of juridical status. By the deadline for registration, December 31, 2000, an estimated 2,095 religious groups were subject to liquidation, and the MOJ reported that by May 2002, approximately 980 of them had been liquidated. The MOJ asserted that most liquidated organizations were defunct, but religious minorities and NGOs contended that a significant number were active. Complaints of involuntary liquidation have decreased in recent years.

The 1997 law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups. Unlike liquidation, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits the activities of an entire religious community. The 1997 law required all religious organizations previously registered under the more liberal 1990 law to reregister by December 31, 2000. In practice, this process, which involves simultaneous registration at both 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 according to spokespersons for the country's two most prominent muftis, some Muslim groups decided that they would not benefit from reregistering.

As with liquidation, complaints of bans against legitimate groups have been decreasing, although a Moscow court judge's decision to uphold on appeal the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses garnered much media coverage and prompted an upswing in anti-Jehovah's Witnesses activity. According to the 2003–2004 Jehovah's Witnesses Country Report for Russia, authorities permitted registration of Jehovah's Witnesses groups in 399 local communities in 72 regions, but problems with registration continued in a number of communities.

Local officials, reportedly sometimes influenced by close relations with local ROC authorities, either refused outright to register groups or created prohibitive obstacles to registration. A lack of specific guidelines to accompany the 1997 law and the shortage of knowledgeable local officials contributed to the problem. There are indications that the Procurator General encouraged local prosecutors to challenge the registration of some nontraditional religious groups.

The Mormons have succeeded in registering more than 45 local religious organizations as of the end of the period covered by the last report. The group had been unable to register a local religious organization in Kazan, Tatarstan, since 1998. The Mormons sued the local Department of Justice in Chelyabinsk after the MOJ rejected 12 applications to register the local Mormon organization in 5 years. The Mormons won at the trial and appellate court levels and were successfully registered.

Many regional Muslim organizations still continue to operate without official registration and, in the Council of Muftis' opinion, registration is not an issue for Muslim organizations. Disagreement between the heads of country's two main Muslim spiritual boards continued and is exploited by the Government for political purposes. Allegations of "Wahhabism" have become pejorative because of persistent allegations that it was to blame for terrorist attacks linked to the war in Chechnya.

In September 2001, the Taganskiy District Court ruled to liquidate the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army and the Moscow City Court upheld the decision in December 2001 according to an amendment to the 1997 law, which requires the MOJ to seek the liquidation of groups who fail to reregister. In February 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Moscow City Court had acted improperly in liquidating the local branch, since it had made repeated and timely attempts to reregister. The MOJ had not reregistered the organization by the end of the reporting period, and as of May, two of the court judgments whereby the applicant branch was stripped of the legal entity status remained in force, despite the ruling of the Constitutional Court. 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 continues to operate based on their 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." A lawyer from the SCLJ has agreed to help the Moscow organization to get the Presneskiy Court ruling repealed and is working with the Salvation Army. The European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) accepted the Salvation Army's case in July 2003 for consideration and ruled on June 24 that the group's complaint that they had not been allowed to reregister is admissible; however, the court declared the rest of the group's complaints inadmissible.

The Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology has continued to be denied registration by the Moscow authorities and is facing threats of liquidation. 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 liquidation, 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. The Church of Scientology filed a suit with the ECHR against the liquidation order, and the court is expected to make a judgement on the case's admissibility in the fall of 2004. Local authorities denied registration to the St. Petersburg branch of the Church of Scientology four times during the previous reporting period and impeded the operation of Scientology centers in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. The Supreme Court also returned for retrial a liquidation order against the Khabarovsk Dianetics Center filed by the local Department of Justice, which the Church of Scientology had lost on appeal.

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities, though 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 November 2002 "Law on Foreigners," which transferred much of the responsibility for visa affairs from the MFA to the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), appears to have disrupted the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers, contributing to the sharp decrease in the issuance of long-term visas and causing hardship for many groups. The FSB has asserted itself into matters dealing with visas and religion, particularly where groups it views as "dangerous cults and sects" are concerned. For example, an FSB official who acted as the official representative of the the country at a June 16 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic, and anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes presented an official statement that labeled members of Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas as examples of xenophobic cults that propagated "fanatical devotion and rejection of other religions" on their Web sites. The sites, which were nonexistent, were given as evidence.

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. In February, Chuyev announced that an interfactional deputies' group, In Support of Traditional Spiritual and Ethical Values of Russia, was to be formed in the State Duma. Chuyev's bill advocating state cooperation on healthcare, social issues, and culture with the traditional religions was not taken up during the Duma's spring session.

A religious news source reported that on May 27 and 28, the State Duma held parliamentary hearings organized by the Committee on Affairs of Public Associations and Religious Organizations on "Improvement of the Legislation on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations—Practice of Implementation and Problems and the Way to Solution." A representative from the MOJ reported that during the past year, investigations into the activities of more than 2,000 religious groups were conducted, leading to 1,900 notifications of various violations of existing legislation. In addition, the MOJ representative reported that 246 petitions were sent to courts requesting the liquidation of a number of religious organizations, and reported that more than 4,000 monuments and more than 15,000 museum exhibits were returned to the Church. The Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kirill testified at the hearing and expressed his opposition to abolishing the 15-year rule, which a working group for the Commission on Questions of Religious Associations of the Government had suggested. The Metropolitan also opposed removing tax privileges for religious organizations and encouraged the Government not to oppose the introduction of a curriculum on the culture of traditional religious organizations into secondary schools.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities established 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 interact with a special department within the Presidential Administration's Directorate for Domestic Policy, entitled 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 majority and minority faiths.

Discussion continued during the period covered by this report on the efficacy of creating a government ministry or organ for religious affairs, although many observers believe the idea may have been dropped after President Putin appointed a new cabinet in March. Interest in establishing such a ministry may have been prompted in part by a view held by a number of government officials, particularly in the security services, that foreign religious groups, particularly Muslims, but also Roman Catholics, some Protestant groups, and a number of religious groups relatively new to the country, constituted security threats that required greater monitoring and possibly greater control. Many religious organizations emphasized that such an institution would be unwelcome if it emulated its Soviet predecessor's repressive activities. Others, including some minority religious groups, believe that such a body could ensure equal treatment for all faiths under the law.

In June, officials in the Kursk region adopted a law restricting missionary activity, including the use of venues in which religious meetings may be held, a religious news service reported. The law was based on a 2001 law that was passed in neighboring Belgorod. A similar law was passed in Smolensk during the period covered by this report. 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 (some groups reportedly sent religious workers on business or tourist visas in order not to alert the authorities to their activities). In 2001, the Belgorod regional 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 courts' decision. Despite passage, local religious officials have indicated that there has been no enforcement of the Belgorod, Smolensk, and Kursk laws.

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 to the greater susceptibility of local governments to discriminatory attitudes and lobbying by local majority religions. 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 Vladimir Putin's expressed desire for greater centralization of power and strengthening 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 appeared 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. The Government only occasionally intervenes to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

The legal code includes strong hate-crime laws. An antiextremism bill was adopted in July 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 Web sites that contain hate speech. Critics charged that the legislation could prompt a dangerous expansion of police power and that the Government had already demonstrated a lack of political will in implementing existing legislation (such as Article 282 of the Criminal Code, which governs cases of incitement of national, racial, or religious hatred). Some observers expressed particular concern about the effect of the legislation on religious freedom. In 2003, authorities in Samara subsequently made use of the antiextremism 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. In the vast majority of crimes targeting Jewish organizations and property, officials generally ignore the anti-Semitic motivation of the crimes and prosecute criminals under the much more lenient charge of "hooliganism."

The Government does not require religious instruction in schools, although in some regions the ROC uses public buildings after hours to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. Although still used by some schools, the Ministry of Education has rejected funding for another edition and further circulation of a textbook to accompany an optional course in public schools on the "Foundations of Orthodox Culture." A human rights group had complained about negative language describing Jews. In May, the Education Minister announced plans for a new school subject entitled, "history of religion," which would teach the history of all religions.

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 on January 1, and two supplements to the law were issued in March. 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. On June 1, Prime Minister Fradkov signed regulations regarding the implementation of the law on alternative civilian service performance. According to the regulations, the standard alternative service term will be 42 months, but the term will be shortened to 36 months if the draftee was assigned to a military organization. The required service for university graduates will be 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 banned, and Muslim conscripts are not given alternatives to pork-based meals or time for daily prayers.

The office of federal Human Rights Ombudsman Aleksandr 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, have expressed their satisfaction with Lukin's performance since he replaced Oleg Mironov, although they have also noted that it is still too early to assess his performance. Others, such as Memorial, note with concern June reports that Lukin and the MVD have agreed that an MVD representative be assigned to all human rights organizations.

Other avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities also exist. The administrative structures of some of the offices of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential District Representatives (polpreds) include offices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials responsible for acting as a liaison with religious organizations; however, it is at the regional and municipal levels that religious minorities often encounter the greatest problems.

The Russian Academy of State Service works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice (SCLJ), to train regional and municipal officials in implementing the law properly. The academy opens up many of its conferences to international audiences.

In June, the federally targeted program on tolerance and antiextremism 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 liquidate 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 unclear at this point, 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, along with state subsidies for building Buddhist temples and training monks. Despite this support, officials state that Buddhism is not the state religion in Kalmykia. Kalmykiya President Ilyumzhinov told a June 3 federal Government meeting that the country's Buddhists intend to appeal to the Constitutional Court against the MFA's decision to deny the Dalai Lama a visa. The Constitutional Court has denied that any appeal had been received.

The local 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.

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 Muslim groups registration. On June 11, 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 cast into law.

In June 2003, President Putin stated publicly that secular authorities would do everything in their power to help improve relations between the ROC and the Vatican. Following this, the President met with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in November 2003, 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 Roman Catholic incursion into traditionally non-Catholic areas.

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 liquidation. 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, groups new to the country are hindered in their ability to practice their faith. The federal Government has attempted to apply the 1997 law widely 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, liquidation, and bans).

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 a religious organization under the 1997 law. Unlike liquidation, which involves only the loss of juridical status, a ban prohibits the activities of an entire religious community. On June 16, 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 religion law. Members of 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." The June 16 ban, although applying only to Moscow, could set a dangerous precedent for the 133,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses practicing in the country.

Many local congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country reported that the rental contracts on their buildings were either being cancelled or that they faced that risk by landlords. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported an increase in these denials after court decisions to ban all religious activity by the group in Moscow, first on March 26 and then on June 16, were publicized. Some landlords have misunderstood the exact ruling and believed they were obligated by law to cancel rental contracts with the group. In Sochi, in June, members of 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 March, the Bashkortostan Supreme Court banned the local Dianetics Center. The Center continues its operations despite the verdict. The Center's representatives have filed an appeal with the Supreme Court and began to prepare documents for filing a suit with the ECHR.

The SCLJ advised the "Faith in Action" Bible College in Vladivostok to seek official registration and counseled the organization that further appeals of a May 2003 Supreme Court decision upholding a March 2003 decision to liquidate the college would be fruitless. The college had been accused of conducting religious education without a license, though lawyers for the school argued there was no basis to the accusations as long as the school did not issue diplomas or certificates.

At the end of the reporting period, the new Magadan Cathedral remained unconsecrated in symbolic recognition of Bishop Jerzy Mazur's absence, despite the arrival of the new Bishop, Kirill Klimovich. In March 2002, Father Shields won his court case, which challenged the legality of his nomination as priest of the local Catholic parish on the grounds that he is a foreign citizen.

Although past reports indicated the FSB made frequent visits to the Family of God Pentecostal Community, the Moscow branch of the SCLJ, which provided legal counseling to the community, reported no continuing harassment during the reporting period, and reported that the community had since been reregistered.

While many of the restrictions on religious freedom are associated with the 1997 law, there were other unrelated restrictions enacted at the local level.

Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities. Forum 18 reported that in March 2003, a 300-member unregistered Baptist community was unexpectedly informed they could no longer rent premises at a public library in Moscow where they had met for the previous 6 years.

Regional and local authorities at times have refused to let facilities to local Jehovah's Witnesses communities, especially since the June 16 Moscow court ruling banning the group. Religious conventions held by members of Jehovah's Witnesses were disrupted in Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Vladimir, Khabarovsk, Stavropol Kray, Nizhniy Novgorod, and Pyatigorsk in the period covered by this report. The Witnesses were told in Vladimir that they could use a venue to meet as long as they had permission from a local Russian Orthodox priest. In Krasnoyarsk, the Jehovah's Witnesses community managed to rent facilities only with assistance of a local expert on religious issues. In August 2003, in Stavropol, members of Jehovah's Witnesses were notified that their convention was cancelled, after territorial and city administrations, the Council for Security in Stavropol Territory, and the ROC met and determined that the meeting presented a high risk for crime in connection with terrorist attacks. When a new location was found, police demanded the event be stopped because a permit had not been obtained and because it was necessary to inspect the premises for explosives. Videotapes of the incident show that officials were armed with large guns. Also in August 2003, in Stavropol, a sign-language convention for members of Jehovah's Witnesses was disrupted when police prevented delegates from entering the building. When a new meeting place was obtained, electricity was cut off from the building; despite this, the convention was held. The members of Jehovah's Witnesses filed a claim against the police for the disruption of the event, but in September 2003, the Oktyabrskiy District Court of the City of Stavropol ruled against the group, and in November 2003, a higher court upheld the decision. In July 2003, police surrounded a stadium in Nizhny Novgorod and prevented delegates from entering the convention. Also in July 2003, a similar convention was disrupted in Pyatigorsk when police blocked the entrance preventing approximately 10,000 delegates from participating. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses lodged a complaint with the Prosecutor's Office of the Stavropol Territory, but the Prosecutor's Office dismissed the complaint.

An unconfirmed report from members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Sakhalin region stated that the group is facing an ongoing campaign by the authorities against their right to gather for worship in the region. Forum 18 reports indicate that following the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses activity in Moscow, one Russian Orthodox priest, Fr. Oleg Stenyayev, suggested a similar ban in Sakhalin region, and that a new Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall be confiscated and given to local Muslims. Sakhalin's Vice-Governor, Georgi Karlov responded favorably to this suggestion.

There are no indications that Pentecostals were harassed by the Khabarovsk administration's Department of Religion during the reporting period.

An unconfirmed Forum 18 report stated that the FSB had summoned the leadership of the Old Believers on the eve of their church leadership election on February 9 to indicate the FSB's preference for a particular candidate who ultimately was not elected.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses cite five child custody cases in which courts have reportedly discriminated against their religion. In Dagestan, in April 2002, a mother lost custody of her two children to an absentee father, because she was a member of Jehovah's Witnesses. The case was appealed to the ECHR and the court found in favor of the mother. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses note that six cases were resolved in favor of members of the group who sought custody of their children.

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, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and others. The FSB, the Procurator, and other official 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, 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.

Although Pastor Martinez' Kingdom of God Church in Moscow reported disruptions by law enforcement officers and others in previous reporting periods, he reported no attacks during this reporting period and his church has been officially registered. Likewise, the Mormons in the Far East have not reported visits by law enforcement officials during this reporting period in contrast with the previous reporting period.

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, anti-Semitic incidents against individuals and institutions continue to occur and violence is used during these attacks with increasing frequency compared with the previous reporting period. The Anti-Defamation League reports that while the number of anti-Semitic incidents remained stable in 2003, the nature of the attacks has become more violent. Anti-Semitic statements are not encouraged and have even been legally prosecuted. While the Government has publicly denounced nationalist ideology and supports legal action against acts of anti-Semitism, reluctance of lower-level officials to call such acts anything other than "hooliganism" remains problematic. In March, prominent Rabbis Berel Lazar and Pinchas Goldshmidt came together to call on the Government to better define the meaning of extremism. Lazar and Goldshmidt 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. In June 2003, President Putin met with major foreign Jewish organization leaders, and in April, many of the same leaders met again with Foreign Minister Lavrov. 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, as well as in the State Duma.

The Rodina bloc united several openly anti-Semitic politicians with former Chairman of the State Duma's International Affairs Commission Dmitriy Rogozin. Originally registered with well-known neo-Nazis on its electoral list, Rodina attempted to improve its image by rejecting openly neo-Nazi candidates; however, it has allowed others known for their anti-Semitic hate speeches to remain, such as Andrey Savelev, a former co-leader of the now defunct Congress of Russian Communities (KRO) and Rogozin, its former primary ideologist.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and his Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) party are also known for their anti-Semitic rhetoric and statements. In Moscow during a May Day celebration, LDPR supporters rallied, carrying anti-Semitic signs and spoke out against what they called "world Zionism."

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) also made anti-Semitic statements during the Duma elections. 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 November 2003 article in "Volgogradskaya Tribuna."

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.

A splinter group of the RNE called "Russian Rebirth" has 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 successfully 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. NDPR ac-

tivists distributed their newspaper Russian Front in downtown Kostroma along with leaflets reading "Russia, liberate yourself from (ethnic slur) fascism."

As reported in 2003, law enforcement personnel monitored some Muslim groups operating in Sverdlosk Oblast, especially their hate literature focused on the conflict in Chechnya. No update on the monitoring, or any subsequent criminal cases, was available at the close of the reporting period.

Some religious personnel experienced visa and customs difficulties while entering or leaving the country. Authorities either deported or denied entry to several religious workers with valid visas during the period covered by this report. Forum 18 news service reports that to date, there are over 30 reported cases of foreign religious workers of various faiths who have been barred from the country since the mid-1990s.

It is difficult to get a religious visa, and some foreign workers reported they feel they have little choice but to conceal the true purpose of their visit. This often leaves foreign workers open to accusations from authorities that they have misrepresented the purpose of their travel and therefore do not qualify for another visa.

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 report difficulty obtaining visas with terms longer than 3 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 3 months, presenting a financial, psychological, and spiritual hardship for such groups. Missionaries under such restrictions must pay for travel back to countries of origin, often not knowing if they may ever 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. Officials in the Duma, MFA, and MOJ have stated that the changes in visa validity are a result of administrative adjustments due to the new regulations. Some have asserted that the issuance of 3-month visas is a temporary situation.

Contrary to previous reporting years, there were no reported expulsions of Roman Catholic priests during the reporting period. Authorities reversed a February 2003 decision that denied Catholic priest Bronislaw Czaplicki, who had worked in the country for 11 years, an extension of his residency permit. He returned to St. Petersburg in May 2003 after being issued a 3-month visa and is no longer having immigration problems. Local Catholic leaders now believe the problem was administrative rather than a conscious effort to limit Catholic activities in the region.

Catholic Archbishop Kondrusiewicz reported that there have not been any visa denials for Catholic priests during the period covered by this report. Other Catholic sources indicate that none of the expelled priests in previous years have been able to return, including Bishop Jerzy Mazur, Fathers Wisniewski and Mackiewicz, all Polish citizens; Father Stefano Caprio, an Italian; and Father Krajnak, a Slovak. In 2003, mostly 3-month visas were issued for Catholic priests, and this situation continues for many priests; however, some now have been able to obtain 1-year visas. Krasnodar Kray remains an extremely difficult region in which to obtain a visa. At the time of this report, only 3-month visas were being issued. Celibate Catholic clergy do not have the option to gain permanent residency or citizenship on the basis of marriage to citizens, unlike other religious workers who have done so.

Contrary to previous reporting periods, there were no reports of religious workers of minority faiths having difficulties registering their visas with the local authorities, as required by law. In March 2002, authorities detained Riga-based Pentecostal pastor Aleksey Ledyayev an estimated 9 to 11 hours before being returned to Riga when he flew to Moscow. Authorities reportedly left Ledyayev's Russian visa in his Latvian passport without canceling it, but offered no explanation for their actions. Ledyayev has not had problems since the incident in March 2002. In the fall of 2002, a Khabarovsk court attempted to deport two Mormon missionaries for failing to register their visas, but the court decision was reversed and the missionaries were successfully registered. The individuals involved did not report continuing problems during the reporting period.

The Government has denied the Dalai Lama a visa since 1994. The MFA announced in June that the Dalai Lama again would not receive a visa out of consideration for the effect visa issuance could have on the country's relations with China. Kalmykiya President Ilyumzhinov promised to appeal the ruling and continues to advocate on the Dalai Lama's behalf.

Mormons noted an improvement in the reporting period in securing visas for their foreign missionaries and reported that all of their foreign missionaries have received

1-year, multiple entry visas. The Mormons 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 accused Mormon missionaries of proselytism.

Dan Pollard of the Vanino Baptist Church in Khabarovsk region continued to be barred from the country as of April, Forum 18 news service reported. Pollard's visa application was rejected first in 1999, despite his acquittal on earlier tax and customs charges. A judge in Khabarovsk issued an order in July 2002 clearing Pollard of any obstacles to entering the country, but Khabarovsk officials have still not complied, even though legal obstacles barring Pollard from the country officially ended in March. Forum 18 reported that the FSB responded to an inquiry from a lawyer for the Church by stating that Pollard would be unable to return. There was no new information available for the case of Charles Landreth of the Church of Christ in Volgograd, who was refused a visa in the fall of 1999 amid accusations in the Volgograd press of spying.

There was no new information available on Patrick Nolan, a member of the Unification Church. Nolan was denied entry in June 2002, because security services considered Nolan's activities a threat to the nation. Nolan lost both a court case in April 2003 and an appeal before the Supreme Court in June 2003.

Leo Martensson, of the Swedish Evangelical Church in Krasnodar, and Victor Barousse, a Christian working for the Global Strategy Missions Association in Irkutsk, were refused visas in 2002 despite both having lived in the country for 9 years. They were not able to return during the reporting period. Larry Little, of the Church of Christ in Komi, continued to be denied permission to return since his religious visa was canceled in 2001. Randolph Marshall, a missionary with the OMS Christian organization continued to be barred since he was refused reentry in November 2002.

The SCLJ reported that it was unaware of further attempts by Jeff and Susan Wollman and Rolland and Virginia Cook to reenter the country, and that the couples continued to be denied visas. The Wollmans and the Cooks had taken an active part in the work of the Christian Church in Kostroma and were denied visas to reenter in July 2002. The Consular Services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the two families were denied visas for state security reasons. There was no information to suggest that American preacher Bill Northon had attempted to reenter the country. Northon was invited to Kostroma by "The Family of God" Pentecostal Church, but was denied a visa on three different occasions, starting in summer 2002, for the same state security reasons.

While most conscripts looking for exemptions from military service sought medical or student exemptions, the courts provided relief to others on the grounds of their religious convictions. 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 based upon a criminal conviction of the appellant. Faizov's efforts to have the conviction overturned reached the Supreme Court in November 2003, but the court upheld the lower courts' decisions. In a separate case, a Russian Orthodox priest was permitted to testify as an expert against a member of Jehovah's Witnesses who had applied for conscientious objector status.

According to nongovernment sources, there have been no criminal cases initiated against conscripts refusing to serve in the military on the grounds of their religious convictions during the reporting period. The law on alternative service came into effect in January, and conscript boards waiting for the new law to come into force made no attempts to prosecute those who refused to participate in military service.

Some religious groups reported problems with religious properties. In Sosnovyy Bor in northwest Russia, local authorities refused to let a Jehovah's Witnesses community use land to construct a prayer center. The refusal was based on the results of a March 14 referendum, in which 90 percent of the city inhabitants voted against the construction.

In Khabarovsk, members of Jehovah's Witnesses purchased a building, but the authorities refused to register the title despite three court orders to do so. The group reported that the building was secretly sold to another buyer under whom the title was registered in February 2003. A claim has been filed against the vendor, the new buyer, and the MOJ and was awaiting trial.

Voronezh authorities prohibited a local Lutheran community from using a private apartment for religious services, but failed to support the prohibition with any legislative acts. For several years, the Voronezh Lutheran Community has been unsuccessful in trying to gain back its church. When registering in 2000, the community had to list a private apartment as its legal address.

Religious news sources reported that Orthodox churches not belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate, including the True Orthodox, have sometimes been restricted from obtaining or holding onto buildings for worship.

The only existing Hare Krishna temple in Moscow has been demolished, and the situation with the construction of a new temple has not been resolved. According to the Moscow Veda Cultural Center, on January 1 Mayor Luzhkov signed a decree allocating land in northwest Moscow for construction of the first Veda temple in the country. Several construction projects of the building have been reportedly under consideration. Moscow authorities have not provided the Center with temporary facilities, but the Center has been successfully renting facilities in Moscow and the Moscow region for gathering and religious services. The difficulties concerning construction of a new complex began in October 2003 when the Union of Orthodox Citizens sent a letter to Moscow Mayor Luzhkov protesting against construction of a Krishna temple on a place called Khodynskiye field.

The Moscow Krishna Community, which is separate from the Hare Krishnas, sought assistance from the leaders of the Russian Interreligious Council, which is made up of representatives of the four traditional religions, but received a refusal from the Council's Executive Secretary Roman Silantyev, who stated that they were a "degrading sect." As of April 21, Deputy Moscow Mayor Vladimir Resin assured the Moscow Krishna Community that it would receive a 3,000 to 4,000 thousand square meter property in Northwest Moscow in order to compensate for its "moral losses."

On April 19, the Moscow Buddhist Community "Rinchen Ling" received notification that a territorial agency of the Moscow Northern Administrative District filed an appeal with the Arbitrary Court demanding that the community be forcefully evicted from its building, which the community received in 1997 for a 15-year beneficial rent. In September 2003, the authorities had decided to demolish the building and demanded that the community vacate the building before the end of 2003. No other buildings were offered to the community and the community did not have money to rent a new building. Despite the lack of a court decision, the community's electric and water supply were cut for 2 days in April.

Citizens in Kaliningrad protested against the construction of a mosque, which the local Muslim community has been requesting since 1993. The ROC is involved in the talks to allow construction. While it claims not to be against the mosque's construction, the local Bishop insists 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 Roman Catholic Community reports 44 disputed properties, most of which were properties used for religious services.

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 some in the Jewish community assert that only a small portion of the total properties confiscated under Soviet rule has been returned. The Jewish community is still seeking the return of a number of synagogues, religious scrolls, and cultural and religious artifacts, such as the Schneerson book collection, a revered collection of the Chabad Lubavitch.

Contrary to the previous reporting period, in which there were no functioning synagogues in Krasnodar Kray, there is now a two-room Jewish community center in Sochi that is used as a synagogue. There are no synagogues in Krasnodar city. There was no information to indicate that officials have returned a synagogue in Krasnodar that was confiscated in 1936. A news service reported in June 2003 that 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 May 2003, Krasnodar officials refused a request by the Jewish community to stop construction of a sports complex that threatened to destroy a Jewish cemetery. There are no updates on this case at the end of the period covered by this report. Muslims in Krasnodar continued unsuccessfully to attempt to gain authorization from the mayor's office to build a new mosque in the city of Sochi.

Roman Catholics continue to pursue legal avenues towards restoration 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. According to ROC officials, the Catholic Church did not submit its proposal to the ROC leadership and therefore has encroached on the ROC's spiritual territory.

The ROC appears to have had greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still has disputed property despite its preferential treatment. Patriarch Aleksiy 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 returning approximately $27,500 (approximately 800,000 rubles) on March 10.

The St. Petersburg Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Community has not been able to get its church returned, which was confiscated by Soviet authorities in 1922, only 7 years after its original purchase.

On January 17, in Stavropol, Cossacks 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 the community; however, opponents argue that the building has never been used for religious services and as the building is located in the center of Stavropol, early morning calls to prayer will wake citizens and will create vehicle and foot traffic as well as noise in an urban residential area.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports that city administrators and local police in the town of Liski, Voronezh Oblast, broke up an antidrug demonstration on August 29, which was organized by the President of the Voronezh Center for Spiritual Rebirth, Pastor Andrey Bashmakov, and the Pastor of the Congregation of the United Churches of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Grigory Protsenko. Bashmakov told the press that attendees were beaten in the street and at the police station. Among the victims were the wife and 12-year-old son of Pastor Protsenko, who suffered head injuries. Witnesses photographed and videotaped the beatings and sent the materials to Moscow news outlets. In January, Protsenko was served notice that a criminal case was opened against him for allegedly resisting and attacking a police officer at the August demonstration. The charges were later dropped, and activists familiar with the case believe that the videotaped evidence played a role. According to Pastor Protsenko, the Deputy Mayor of Liski said he opposed Protesenko's group in principle and stated the Pentecostals were a sect.

In March, a roundtable was held to discuss special operations conducted by law enforcement agencies in Moscow mosques leading up to the Presidential elections in May. Many Muslims were detained during the operations, which the Moscow police claimed were carried out on agreement with the Spiritual Directorate for European Russia (SDER); however, the SCER refuted the police claims. The Moscow Muslim Community condemned the law enforcement agencies' actions and claimed that they looked like deliberate attempts to destabilize the situation before the election.

There were instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in the public discussion of their religious views, but such incidences were 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 on city streets, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing.

There were no received reports of continued raids on groups suspected of terrorism during the period covered by this report. In June 2003, authorities carried out a raid on Muslim terrorist suspects, many of who were suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an international Islamic group banned in the country in February 2003. Officials freed most of the suspects the following day; criminal proceedings on weapons charges were opened against only two of the suspects.

There were reports of short-term religious detainees but no reports of religious 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

Religious news services report that in June the Arbitration Court of Sverdlovsk Oblast ordered the shutdown of a local anti-Semitic paper, Russkaya Obshchina Yekaterinburga, according to the Jewish National-Cultural Autonomy of Sverdlovsk

Oblast. The newspaper had received three warnings from the Ministry of the Press based on complaints from activists. In October 2002, the Prosecutor's office had closed the criminal case; however, in June, the Court found that the newspaper violated the laws banning incitment of ethnic hatred and ordered the newspaper closed down. The court also fined a company that publishes the newspaper approximately $34 (1,000 rubles).

In March, then Russian 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 country's existing statutes outlawing extremism, specifically article 282 of the Criminal Code (inciting ethnic hatred), and anti-Semitism and tolerance education programs. In addition, Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev became the first high government official to acknowledge the existence of right-wing extremist youth groups in the country. Combating this extremism was one of the top priority tasks for the MVD and FSB, he said. These statements marked a positive step on behalf of the Government in its willingness to prosecute those who commit acts of anti-Semitism, although few concrete steps have been taken to solve high-profile cases, such as the killing of a 9-year-old Tajik girl that prompted Nurgaliyev's statement.

Some minority groups were able to obtain restitution of their religious property. In June 2003, city authorities in Oryol approved the restitution of a synagogue in the city after years of petitions by the local Jewish community. There have been no additional reports of problems concerning the property during the period covered by this report. The Buryat leaders of the traditional Buddhist Sangha (Organization) won back the rights to the oldest Buddhist temple in Europe during the previous reporting period, and continue to occupy the building. A secular group had occupied the temple for the previous 4 years, despite a 2002 city court decision in favor of the Sangha. City officials supported the Buddhists' efforts to occupy the temple.

In March, 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. In December 2003, the Tula regional Duma refused to support the 1994 decision without offering an explanation for the change. In March, 13 out of 25 Duma deputies unexpectedly voted in favor of returning the church to the community. Tula Mayor Kazakov signed the corresponding decree on March 30.

The delayed construction of the Catholic Church in Pskov resumed in September 2003, and the church has been completed. Roman Catholics also obtained final approval from the mayor's office for construction of a church in the historical center of Yaroslavl. The land adjoins a building that housed a pre-Revolutionary Catholic chapel, and while approval was withheld unexpectedly in July 2003, construction has resumed and is proceeding according to schedule.

The Government has backed off from previous plans to introduce an optional course, "Foundations of Orthodox Culture," using a textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture. Although still used by some schools, the Ministry of Education has rejected funding for another edition and further circulation of the textbook. A human rights group had complained about anti-Semitic language in the book. In December 2003, former Education Minister Vladimir Filippov announced that the issue would be left up to regional Governments, and perhaps even individual schools. In May, the current Education Minister, Andrei Fursenko, announced plans for a new school subject entitled, "history of religion," which would teach the history of all religions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens; however, many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the ROC is at the heart of what it means to be Russian. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as societal hostility toward Roman Catholics and newer, non-Orthodox religions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it was often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, 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, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and religions new to the country, and some ROC leaders publicly expressed similar views.

There is no large-scale movement in the country to promote interfaith dialogue, although the President oversees a Commission of Religious Affairs that includes representatives from a wide range of faiths that are active in the country. 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 Christians; however, the Patriarch appeared displeased with the Vatican's 2002 decision to upgrade its four apostolic administrations to dioceses. Individuals closely associated with Russian Orthodox and Muslim hierarchies made numerous hostile statements opposing the decision and continue to consider it a source of tension.

A number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers are readily available throughout the country. They carry anti-Semitic as well as anti-Muslim and xenophobic leaflets, much of which violates the law against extremism. Nevertheless the production of this material continues, and the publishers are rarely prosecuted. For example, an anti-Semitic novel, The Nameless Beast, by Evgeny 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 Anti-Defamation League, 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 are generally unwilling to recognize the presence of anti-Semitic content. Some NGOs claimed that many of these publications are owned or managed by the same local authorities that refuse to take action against offenders.

Other examples of anti-Semitic hate speech include the painting of the main entrance of a Jewish school with anti-Semitic graffiti in October 2003 and a December 2003 preelection comparison of Judaism to Satanism in the Bryansk local administration's official newspaper.

Anti-Semitism and xenophobic thought has become increasingly popular among certain sectors of the population. Nationalistic parties, such as Rodina and LDPR, have gained a wider voter base by addressing issues of nationalism, race, ethnicity, and religion.

The number of underground nationalist extremist organizations (as distinguished from such quasipublic groups as the RNE) appears to be growing. According to the MOI, there are approximately 50,000 skinheads in the country, including between 5,000 and 5,500 in Moscow. The primary targets of skinheads were foreigners and individuals from the North Caucasus, but they expressed anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments as well. As in previous years, nationalists distributed anti-Semitic literature in Moscow and elsewhere during the Victory Day holiday in May.

Hostility toward non-Russian Orthodox religious groups sparked harassment and occasionally even physical attacks. On June 19, Nikolai Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism, was shot and killed in his apartment in St. Petersburg after a death threat appeared on the Web site 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.

Muslims, the largest religious minority, continue to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas. Discrimination has become stronger since the onset of the conflict in the predominantly Muslim region of Chechnya and the 2002 takeover of a Moscow theater by armed Chechen separatists and suicide bombings at the Tushino airfield in July 2003 and on the Moscow metro in January. Muslims have claimed that citizens in certain regions have a fear of 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. In the fall of 2002 and spring of 2003, several prominent human rights activists expressed concern about the rise in anti-Islamic attitudes.

Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment, and a large number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers distributed throughout the country carry anti-Muslim, as well as anti-Semitic and xenophobic leaflets.

Muslim activists complain that the country is not entirely a secular state, based on the Government's active support of the Russian Orthodox majority. Muslim recruits serving in the army often are subjected to insults and abuse on the basis of religion. Tatarstan's human rights ombudsman reported that many Muslim youths have deserted the army rather than risk going to Chechnya and fighting fellow Muslims.

In Muslim-dominated regions other than Chechnya, relations between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers are generally harmonious. In the Volga region, a liberal brand of Islamic thought dubbed "Euro-Islam" has been growing in influence; however, tensions occasionally emerge. Law enforcement organizations closely watch Muslim groups operating in the country. 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 immediately associated with terrorism and radical Muslim fighters in Chechnya and Ingushetiya.

The chairman of the Council of Muftis, Ravil Gaynutdin; the head of the Central Spiritual Board of Russia's Muslims, Talgat Tadzhuddin; and the head of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus, Ismail Berdiev issued a joint statement denouncing terrorism. The leaders declared that it was necessary to put up resistance against extremists and terrorists who make use of religious slogans.

In May, 50 tombs were desecrated in Yekaterinburg. Similar acts of vandalism at this cemetery were reported in spring 2003. On May 9, 30 tombstones were broken during the night in a Sverdlovsk cemetery. No investigation results have been reported. Twenty-six tombs were desecrated in a Muslim cemetery in Yoshkar-Oly in February; witnesses claim to have seen 40 teenagers in the cemetery area. In November 2003, a mosque in Bratsk, Irkutsk Region was set on fire, and while regional authorities promised aid to the local Muslim community, it was never provided nor were the arsonists ever found. In August 2003, in Chelyabinsk, a Muslim cemetery was desecrated and swastikas were painted on several tombstones. In May 2003, a mosque in Usole-Sibirsk was firebombed during a worship service. No one was injured in the attack. There was no new information available on the case at the end of the period covered by this report.

During the reporting period, vandals regularly attacked the "Tauba" mosque in Nizhniy Novgorod. Groups of teenagers and young persons routinely threw dirt at the walls and broke the mosque's windows. Mosque employees reported threats, and vandals in April again broke windows and painted swastikas on the walls. A police guard was stationed at the mosque to prevent any incidents related to Hitler's birthday celebration, but the mosque was attacked in the night after the guards left. Nizhniy Novgorod's Regional Spiritual Board of Muslims has repeatedly contacted the local police and district administration but no concrete measures have been taken.

It has been estimated that the number of xenophobic publications exceeds 100; many of which are sponsored by local chapters of NDPR. The larger anti-Semitic publications are Russkaya Pravda, Vitaz, and Peresvet, which are easily available in the multitude of metro stations located around Moscow. In addition, there are at least 80 Russian Web sites dedicated to distributing anti-Semitic propaganda; the law does not restrict Web sites that contain hate speech.

In June 2002, the local prosecutor's office in Ulyanovsk opened a criminal case under Article 282 against the editor of the local newspaper Orthodox Simbirsk, who ran a number of articles demonizing Jewish persons. In January, there were preliminary hearings in Leninskiy District Court. The case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Jewish groups report that although the number of attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions has remained constant over the past few years, the severity of such violent attacks has increased. Crimes are mostly committed by young skinhead groups, whose numbers have increased from only a few dozen in 1992 to over 50,000 today. 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.

In April, Jewish youth leader Aleksandr Golynsky was beaten near his home in Ulyanovsk and sent to the hospital. Two days later, skinheads stormed the Ulyanovsk Jewish Center screaming, "don't pollute our land," smashing windows, and tearing down Jewish symbols as two Jewish youths hid inside. No one was injured, but police failed to respond quickly, arriving 40 minutes after the time they were called. A member of the extremist National Bolshevik Party was later arrested in connection with the attack. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. It is suspected that both events were prompted by the anniversary of Hitler's birthday. Other examples of recent attacks include rocks being thrown through the Kostroma synagogue windows while persons prayed inside on Yom Kippur night in September and December 2003, and vandals who threw rocks through the windows of Bryansk's Jewish school.

Several Jewish cemeteries were desecrated during the reporting period including cemeteries in Bryansk, Ulyanovsk, and Petrozavodsk. In Petrozavodsk, unknown

persons sprayed anti-Semitic graffiti on tombstones on the day a local court was to render a decision in another case concerning cemetery desecration. In April, vandals damaged 14 tombstones in Pyatigorsk's Jewish cemetery in Stavrapol Oblast. On March 31, a Jewish cemetery was desecrated in Kaluga, and after the local Jewish community Chairman notified the Governor about the incident, four teenagers and two adults suspected in the vandalism were detained. The four teenagers were released due to their age, and the two adults are still under investigation. In February, several Jewish tombs were desecrated in one of the oldest cemeteries in St. Petersburg and swastikas were painted on the tombstones. In September 2003, an anti-Semitic poster with wires attached to it was found at the Velikiy Novgorod Synagogue, and in October a suspected bomb was found on one of the tombs at the Kostroma Jewish cemetery. In contrast to similar incidents in 2002, both bombs were found to be a harmless imitation. At the end of July 2003, the only Jewish cemetery in Stavropol Kray was desecrated.

There were several new attacks on a synagogue in Kostroma during the reporting period. One Jewish person there was injured during an attack in December 2003. Reportedly teenagers threw stones at the windows and covered the synagogue fence with anti-Semitic inscriptions. Local police doubted they would be able to find the vandals and a local rabbi said the attack was being blamed on hooliganism.

A synagogue in Yaroslavl was attacked in August 2003. Vandals attempted to torch a synagogue and library in Chelyabinsk in February, but neighbors managed to extinguish the fire before the arrival of firefighters. The local Jewish community representatives suspected a local anti-Semitic organization was responsible for the attack. On April 11, a group of young persons threw bottles at a synagogue in Nizhniy Novgorod. The police failed to catch the vandals, and the criminal investigation was dropped on April 22.

In Voronezh, on April 29, two skinheads attacked Aleksey Kozlov outside the headquarters of the Inter-Regional Human Rights Movement of which he is in charge. Kozlov is the regional monitor for anti-Semitism and racism in the country, a project sponsored by the European Commission.

Pyatigorsk Catholic priest Michael Rogers was attacked in his apartment in December 2003. Rogers was injured though he was able to fend off his attackers. The local branch of the FSB joined the criminal investigation started by the local police department. 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 November 2003. The Vatican's decision in 2002 to change the name of the administrative units in Russia to dioceses remained a source of tension. 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 Convent whose main mission would be to work with orphans in the city of Nizhny Novgorod. In February, the Nizhniy Novgorod Diocese of the ROC said this decision was considered by the ROC as an "a priori" unfriendly move. The Nizhniy Novrogod 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.

In February, Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, met with His Holiness, Alexiy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and the Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, Kirill, who is the president of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of Foreign Ecclesiastical Relations, to engage in ecumenical dialogue between the two Churches. During Kaspar's visit, Patriarch Aleksiy told the press that the establishment of a 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, in particular, that Roman Catholics have baptized Orthodox orphans.

In March, a lawyer noted that the situation for Protestants in the country has been dramatically worsening for the last 4 years. A Pentecostal prayer center in Moscow Oblast was set on fire in February and similar incidents were reported in Chekhov, Balashikha, Tula, Lipetsk, and Nizhniy Tagil. Local law enforcement agencies have taken no actions in any of the cases.

As a consequence of beatings and the burning of his church building in 2001 by unknown assailants who were never apprehended, an African-born Pentecostal pastor and his congregation in the Moscow suburb of Chekhov disbanded mid-year in 2003 after continued threats and harassment. Efforts were made to continue using

apartments to meet for worship, but gradually the congregation dwindled as a result of pressure. Other African ministers of non-Orthodox Christian churches also experienced prejudicial treatment, based apparently on a combination of religious and racial prejudice.

The SCLJ reported that on January 13 there was an explosion in a Tula Baptist building. The Tula Baptist community believes the incident was a terrorist act, as community members had been receiving threats from unknown persons. The Tula Baptists do not belong to the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists and follow the movement of so-called "separated Baptists."

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. A common prejudice circulating among the general public is that members of Jehovah's Witnesses are "spies of imperialism." In January, the governor of Stavropol Kray compared members of Jehovah's Witnesses to Wahhabis, a particularly damning comparison in Stavropol, an area that has been attacked by Chechen separatists.

In May 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 "anticult" 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. There were no reports during the reporting period of continued harassment of members of the group in St. Petersburg.

In December 2003, Yuriy Samodurov, the Director of the Sakharov Center, was served notice that a long-pending case against him and four others for organizing a provocative exhibit of religious art entitled "Danger, Religion" at the Sakharov Center would go to trial. All are charged with inciting religious and ethnic hatred. The January 2003 exhibit roused the ire of the ROC and was defaced on January 18 by six vandals whom police caught at the scene. Upon their arrest, the vandals explained that the exhibition offended their Russian Orthodox beliefs. The vandals were never charged, although just days after the attack, criminal proceedings were initiated against Samodurov and the other four individuals. They face various penalties, including a $16,700 (484,467 rubles) fine, a 3 to 5 year prison sentence, or being banned from their professions for the next 5 years. The trial began on June 15, at the Tagansky district court in Moscow. An authorized picket in protection of freedom of conscience against state and clerical censorship, and against prosecutions for political and ideological heterodoxy passed opposite the court building the same day. On June 16, the judge sent the indictment back to the Procuracy because of flaws, which it was to fix within 5 days for resubmission. The trial has yet to restart. Aleksiy II, the Patriarch of the ROC, recently issued a general statement that included criticism of the Sakharov Center.

Speakers associated with the ROC took part in antisect conferences and meetings around the country. Aleksandr Dvorkin, Chairman of St. Ireneus of Lion Information and Consulting Center, suggested that the status of several registered religious organizations in the country, the Hare Krishnas, Scientologists, and the Unification Church in particular, be reviewed in that they should be banned. Rabbi Berl Lazar suggested that the Government adopt a law prohibiting sect activities and defining which religious organizations are a sect.

Members of some religions continued to face discrimination in their efforts to rent premises and conduct group activities. Religious minorities report both official pressure and personal prejudice as obstacles to renting space. According to Forum 18 and reports from members of Jehovah's Witnesses, confusion over the meaning of the recent ban on the group in Moscow led some landlords to cancel leases.

A continuing pattern of violence, with either religious or political motivations, against religious workers in the North Caucasus was evident during the period covered by this report. Foreign religious workers have been deterred or prohibited from entering war zones in the North Caucasus, and information about religious activity in the area is largely unavailable.

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 consulate generals 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 the country's 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 over 20 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's addresses religious freedom by maintaining a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO. Two positions in the Embassy's political section are dedicated to human rights and religious freedom issues. These officers work closely with consular and public affairs officers in Moscow and other U.S. Consulates around the country.

Consular officers routinely investigate criminal, customs, and immigration cases involving foreign citizens and attempt to determine whether they involve possible violations of religious freedom. Consular officers also raised the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the MOI and the MFA. Embassy officers also meet with missionaries during regional travel in the country's interior.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed the theme of 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. The U.S. Ambassador hosted a Passover Seder for local contacts, and the Consul General in Yekaterinburg hosted an Iftar dinner for Muslim contacts to celebrate Ramadan. Representatives from the Embassy attended trials relating to issues of religious belief and a political officer was present at the delivery of the verdicts against the members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow on March 26 and June 16.

The U.S. Government presses for the country's adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the State Department met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about religious freedom, as well as with visiting representatives of Russian religious organizations, the Esther Legal Center, the SCLJ, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering local religious organizations. In May, an officer with responsibilities for the country reports on human rights and religious freedom held meetings in Moscow with officials, members of faith-based organizations, and human rights advocacy groups.

On May 20, members of the Helsinki Commission held a hearing on human rights in Russia. Several members of Congress made statements urging Russia to respect human rights and religious freedom. Witnesses testified about patterns of abuse toward minority, especially Protestant, religions. On June 7, Helsinki Commission staff held a briefing by four Russian human rights advocates. When asked about the status of religious freedom, one replied that the situation is worsening and becoming harsh for all minority religions, even traditional groups, as the Patriarchy seeks identification of Russian Orthodoxy as the State religion.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) works to promote tolerance and human rights. USAID awarded a grant to the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal to continue promoting its "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 participate in the Councils; however, in June, a federally targeted program on tolerance and anti-extremism was closed down by the Russian Government ahead of its original 2005 end date. In June 2003, the grantee organized a conference on combating hate crimes in Ryazan for over a hundred students and cadets of the Ryazan branch of the Moscow University of the MVD. Also in June 2003, the grantee organized a conference for a hundred participants in Kazan to focus on relations among diverse religious groups (including Russian Orthodox practitioners, Muslims, and Roman Catholics). Participants attended from the northwest and central regions, the Volga region, and Stavropol, and included ethnic and religious representatives, government officials, and NGO activists.

During the reporting period, USAID supported the Ural NGO Support Center, which 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 have already reached more than 550 teenagers and raised their awareness of interethnic and interreligious issues.

USAID also supported 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 the arena of social policy. Representatives of different religious communities and government officials took part in the conference. The conference aided the different religious organizations in uniting their efforts to assist street children, migrants, and other people in difficult situations. Participants also established a Web site to serve as a virtual resource center for state officials and community leaders. One direct result of the project was further refining of the proposal to change federal legislation concerning the regulation of religion that was submitted to the Committee on Religion Affairs.

The U.S. Government organized exchanges under the International Visitor program with a focus on religious freedom issues during the period covered by this report. A group of mullahs, imams, Islamic journalists, and directors of Islamic cultural centers participated in a U.S. International Visitor program entitled, Promoting Multiculturalism: Islam in the U.S, in June and July of 2003.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy's Democracy Commission, a small (up to $24,000—approximately 700,000 rubles) grants program supporting local NGOs pursuing projects related to ethnic, racial, and religious tolerance, approved nine tolerance-related grants totaling approximately $106,000 (3,074,000 rubles).

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 a total 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 is no recent census data providing information on religious membership; however, it is estimated that over 95 percent of the population is Catholic. There are also small groups of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and adherents to the Baha'i Faith (who organize small, active missionary groups), some Muslims, and members of the Waldensian 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 religious groups (the Waldensian Church and members of 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, to date, 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 Agata, Easter, Corpus Domini, All Saints Day, Commemoration of the Dead, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas are considered 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.

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. They also affect societal lifestyles independently of individual compliance with Catholic precepts (such as strictures on divorce).

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.

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 republic 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 worst vandalism during the period covered by this report was the burning of two mosques, in Nis and Belgrade, in reaction to violence against Serbs during March riots in Kosovo. The Jewish community in Serbia reported an increase in anti-Semitic hate speech and threats on the Internet during the period covered by this report. Leaders of minority religious communities often relate acts of vandalism to negative media reporting labeling them as "sects." Police and government 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 a total land 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. Roman Catholics make up about 4 percent of the population of Serbia and Montenegro, mostly Hungarians in Vojvodina, ethnic Albanians in Montenegro, and Croats in Vojvodina and Montenegro. Protestants make up about 1 percent of the population and include Adventists, Baptists, Reformed Christians, Evangelical Christians, Evangelical Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, Pentecostals, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Serbia and Montenegro has a small and aging Jewish population numbering a few thousand. The remainder of the population professes other faiths or considers itself atheists. According to Montenegro's 2003 census, almost 70 percent of its population is Orthodox, 21 percent is Muslim, and 4 percent is Catholic.

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 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. The majority Serbian Orthodox Church receives some preferential consideration.

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 February 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.

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" (Serbian Orthodoxy, Islam, Roman Catholicism, the Slovak Evangelical Church, Judaism, the Reform Christian Church, or the Evangelical Christian Church), or they can elect to substitute a class in civic education. The proportion of students registering for religious education grew during the period covered by this report, but registrations for civic education courses continued to predominate. Some Protestant leaders and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Serbia 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 no progress noted during the period covered by this report on restitution of previously seized church property. There were indications that restitution of religious property would be addressed in Serbia by a wider law on restitution of nationalized private property. Montenegro's Law on Restitution, enacted early this year, does not cover religious property; restitution of religious property will be addressed in a special law on the subject, but no timetable exists for its enactment.

In February, Catholic Priest Don Branko Sbutega publicly opposed Government construction of a World Bank-funded waste disposal site in Lovanja, near Kotor, Montenegro. He claimed that the Government violated property rights of citizens and the Catholic Church, which had title to part of the land. Local media reports alleged the Government concealed improper legal documentation for the site to avoid losing World Bank funding. Although this issue remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report, construction continued.

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—through a requirement for an additional postage stamp. After the widespread destruction of the Church's property in Kosovo in March, the Serbian Government decided to subsidize salaries of Orthodox clergy in Kosovo.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Office of Religious Affairs of the state union's Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, an interlocutor with minority religious groups, has not obtained satisfactory government action in response to reports of vandalism and other societal acts against these groups. However, representatives of minority religious communities reported good relations with this office.

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 dietary requirements of Islamic soldiers, 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.

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 March 2003. Montenegrin officials claim the transfer was an illegal attempt to prevent the republic 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 covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

A long-running dispute between the southern Serbian city of Leskovac and a tent church used by the Protestant Evangelical Roma Church expanded on April 30 when building inspectors, three police cars, an electrical distribution company crew and a demolition team arrived to demolish the church. The tent church had been singled out for demolition although all 463 structures in the area, including an industrial plant and many houses, were illegal. Worshippers prevented the demolition, and the city later that day agreed to allow relocation of the tent church. As part of the agreement, the city offered to provide for free a 22,000-square-meter site in an industrial zone, as well as electricity, water, sewage, and an asphalt road for the site. The church was required to purchase one of the two adjacent privately owned sites to facilitate road access. The church agreed with the owner of one of the adjacent sites and acquired the necessary funding, but the municipality's ownership department has required opinions from Serbia's Ministries of Religion and Building before approving the sale. The sale had not been completed by the end of the period covered by this report.

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 and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The state union Government has implemented civilian service as an alternative to mandatory army service. Civilian service options complement the non-lethal options already present for conscripts who object to military service for reasons of conscience. There are no reports of religious adherents serving sentences for conscientious objection to the draft.

In 2002, Serbian courts began proceedings in the Savic case, in which an author of anti-Semitic literature was tried for spreading racial or national hatred through the printed word. According to sources in the Jewish community of Serbia and Montenegro, a number of continuances have been issued in this trial. The latest continu-

ance, granted to allow for a psychiatric examination of the defendant, had been ongoing for over a year at the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

While relations between members of different religious groups are good, there were some instances of discrimination against representatives of religious minorities in the country. Religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout Serbia and Montenegro, and in many cases it is difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin. A number of the incidents of religious discrimination or harassment that occurred during the period covered by this report appear to have been based more on ethnicity than on religion.

After the December 28, 2003, parliamentary elections—in which the Serbian Radical Party rebounded by taking a plurality of seats—there was an upsurge in vandalism and violence against minority ethnic and religious groups in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina. Among the incidents that targeted religious sites or adherents were: (1) the January 19 desecration of a Hungarian Catholic cemetery in Novi Sad; (2) the January 19 desecration of a Reformist church in Sombor; (3) the January 24 desecration of a Croatian Catholic cemetery in Subotica; (4) the desecration of another Subotica graveyard, where Croats and Bunjevci (both Catholic groups) are buried, on the night of March 26–27; (5) the desecration of 21 gravestones in the Catholic and Orthodox graveyard in Novi Becej between May 1 and 2; and (6) an attack in Novi Sad on two Christian Adventist priests who were trying to defend church members from six youths who entered the church after evening services and began cursing and shouting. One of the attackers grabbed a priest by the neck and then attacked the other priest. Police were called and arrested the attackers. The investigation of this incident is ongoing. One violent incident that predated the parliamentary elections was the August 8, 2003, attack on a music concert organized by the local Church of God Pentecostal in Vrdnik in Vojvodina. A power line for the concert was cut with an axe, and an explosive device was thrown near the stage, damaging nearby cars. Police investigated the incident, but they have not identified the perpetrators.

In reaction to widespread violence by ethnic Albanians against Serbs and their personal and religious property in Kosovo on March 17, there were protests and violence in Serbia and Montenegro beginning on the night of March 17–18. This reaction included violence against Muslim religious sites in Serbia and Montenego, although the sites belonged primarily to Bosniak, not ethnic Albanian, Muslims.

During the night of March 17–18, the Belgrade mosque was looted and set on fire by a mob of thousands of youths, reportedly mostly from Belgrade's sports clubs, who went to the mosque after demonstrating in front of the Serbian Government building. The first police officers to respond to the mosque created a cordon around it, but they were equipped inadequately and the mob pushed them aside; some officers were injured. Officers who arrived later were better equipped, but they did not confront the mob. Two fire trucks arrived nearby before the mosque was set on fire, but firefighters did not attempt to get to the mosque when the arson occurred, although they did reach the mosque about 2 hours later. The mosque was damaged, but it remained structurally sound; however another building on the compound was destroyed. Six cars, including three police cars, also were destroyed. Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Amfilohije and some followers vigorously attempted to protect the mosque. Government and political leaders condemned the attack, and the Interior Minister later fired the police commander of the Stari Grad neighborhood where the mosque is located for inadequate police response. The Belgrade and Stari Grad Governments each have pledged $34,480 (2 million dinars) to repair the mosque. (Reconstruction of the mosque facade, already on the Belgrade City planned rehabilitation list, was moved to the top of the list after the attack.) Police arrested 110 persons for the attack. Shortly after a radio station carried the address of a Muslim boy who was injured when he fell from the roof of the mosque during the rioting, an explosive device was thrown at his house. Later the same night, a mob broke windows at the U.S. Embassy and damaged two Embassy vehicles; it also attacked the Croatian Embassy. The mob was prevented from reaching the Albanian Embassy, which is in a remote location.

The same night, the mosque in the southern Serbian city of Nis was set on fire. Although police and firefighters soon arrived, the thousands of rioters surrounding the building prevented their approaching the mosque, which, along with the minaret, was gutted. Eleven persons have been charged in the attack with "joining together for violent activity," which carries a sentence of up to 5 years in prison. Nis municipality has pledged to refurbish the mosque completely.

Attacks also took place against Muslim property in Serbia's northern province of Vojvodina in reaction to the Kosovo events. The Helsinki Committee of Serbia noted 40 attacks between March 17 and 21 against property owned by Albanian and Bosniak Muslims in Vojvodina. Also, in the western Serbian town of Mali Zvornik, mosque windows were broken with stones on March 20.

In Bar, Montenegro, an Islamic community bookstore was stoned on March 20; the offenders had not been found by the end of the period covered by this report. The same day, police detained 10 young men in Podgorica, Montenegro who threatened to set fire to Podgorica's main mosque. Police questioned the youths in the presence of their parents and released them; no legal action was planned out at the end of the period covered by this report.

There was also an attack against at least one non-Muslim religious site, apparently in reaction to the events in Kosovo. On the evening of March 18, a Protestant Bible Cultural Center in Nis was burned by a mob of 30 persons that threw Molotov cocktails.

Minority religious communities report continued problems with vandalism of church buildings, cemeteries, and other religious premises. According to the Forum 18 News Service, more than 50 attacks occurred during the period covered by this report. Many of the attacks involved spray-painted graffiti, rock throwing, or the defacing of tombstones, but a number of cases involved more extensive damage. There were a number of incidents in which gravestones were desecrated, including those in Jewish, Islamic, and Lutheran cemeteries. On April 27, the Catholic Church of Sveti Matej in Kotor, Montenegro, was defaced with an image of three raised fingers—a sign of Serbian nationalism—and graffiti reading, "This church should be burnt down," and "Serbia." The former synagogue of Nis, Serbia, was defaced with a swastika and graffiti reading "Serbia for the Serbs" and "skinheads."

Jewish leaders in Serbia reported a continued increase in anti-Semitism on the Internet. According to representatives of the Union of Jewish Communities of Serbia and Montenegro, anti-Semitic hate speech often appears in small-circulation books. The release of new books (or reprints of translations of anti-Semitic foreign literature) often leads 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 nationalism.

Anti-sect propaganda continued in the Serbian press, which labels minority Christian churches—including Baptists, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses—and some other minority faiths "sects." Religious leaders have noted that instances of vandalism often occur soon after press reports on sects. In July the periodical Nin published a special supplement entitled "Sects—Spiritual Drug" funded by the Karic Foundation; the supplement contained articles on the dangers of various minority religions. The daily Novosti ran a series of anti-sect articles, beginning in February. 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 use 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. Nevertheless, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church remains schismatic in the eyes of official Orthodoxy. One focus of controversy continued to be the Berane Yule log ceremony. During the period covered by this report, Montenegrin Orthodox and Serbian Orthodox believers in several municipalities, including Berane, burned their Yule logs in separate locations. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church in Bijelo Polje decided not to hold the ceremony. Municipal authorities in Bar were reluctant to allow Yule Log burning for security reasons, but did not stop the ceremonies. The two churches continue to contend for adherents and to make conflicting property claims, but this contention has not been 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, the landlord of a building used by a Protestant denomination in Montenegro requested the church to remove a sign from the building announcing dates and times of services. Missionaries of the denomination, which wishes to remain anonymous, recently reported that in 2002 their mission's car was firebombed. Local police responded quickly to the incident, but the perpetrators have not been found.

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. These representations have included meetings with Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, Serbian President-elect Boris Tadic, Serbian Interior Minister Dragan Jocic, and Serbia and Montenegro Minister for Human and Minority Rights Rasim Ljajic. Embassy Officials urged these leaders 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.

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, decreased during the period covered by this report; however, incidents peaked again during riots from March 17–19 that were sparked by events during a time of general discontent concerning UNMIK involvement in Kosovo. The March riots resulted in the deaths of 19 persons, numerous injuries, and widespread property damage connected with ethnic minorities, including 30 Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries and cemeteries and over 900 homes.

Prior to the March riots, the status of respect for religious freedom had improved somewhat during the period covered by this report, with attempts by Kosovo leaders to include the Serbian Orthodox minority. However, ethnic tensions between Kosovo's Albanians and Serb populations remained noticeable throughout the period covered by this report and significantly increased in March. Most of these tensions were largely rooted in ethnic, rather than religious, bias. Prior to the March riots, a few Orthodox religious sites were attacked, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, but the number of such attacks had decreased. Until March, the protection of Serbian Orthodox churches and other religious symbols continued to be transferred from the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) to U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS); however, following the March riots, this transfer was halted and KFOR increased the number of checkpoints. Since the March riots, Kosovo leaders, with prompting by internationals, sought to address the concerns of persons displaced by the violence and agreed to cooperate with religious site reconstruction.

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. The U.S. Government also supports UNMIK and KFOR in their security and protection arrangements for churches and patrimonial sites. U.S. Office Pristina and USKFOR's activities during the March riots helped by halting further escalation, resulting in several religious sites being saved from looting and burning.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Kosovo has a total land 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 about 100,000 reside in Kosovo and 225,000 in Serbia and Montenegro, are largely Serbian Ortho-

dox. Approximately 3 percent of ethnic Albanians are Roman Catholic. Protestants make up less than 1 percent of the population but have small populations in most of Kosovo's cities.

Foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize. There are Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries active in Kosovo. There are approximately 64 faith-based or religious organizations registered with UNMIK who list their goals as the provision of humanitarian assistance or faith-based outreach.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

In May 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 December 2001. In March 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, religious holy days of the Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox faiths.

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. The Kosovo Prime Minister's Office established a working group to draft a law on religious freedom and legal status of religious communities in Kosovo, with the first meeting held in July 2003. The group consists of representatives of religious groups in Kosovo; however, Serbian Orthodox representatives have thus far declined to participate. This decision reflects the Kosovo Serb political leadership's belief that any Kosovo Serb participation legitimizes Kosovo Albanian institutions. The working group continues to provide Serbian Orthodox representatives with drafts of the law. The group is currently on the third draft of the law, with additional work to be done before the final version is sent to the Kosovo Assembly and the SRSG for 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 has also complained 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 for allocation of space for new mosques. There have been some complaints by Kosovar Muslim leaders that they are not consulted prior to registration of foreign Islamic NGOs with UNMIK.

At the end of the period covered by this report, various groups released reports analyzing the performance of KFOR, CIVPOL, and KPS during the March riots and the future role of each entity. Serbian Orthodox priest Father Sava said that "everything failed" regarding the protection of religious sites during the March riots. In its latest report, "Human Rights Challenges Following the March Riots," the OSCE Mission in Kosovo stated that UNMIK, KFOR and KPS could have done more to protect minorities in the period following the March riots. The report declared that KPS needed to become a more effective, accountable, and human rights compliant police force and asserted that despite the political progress since the March violence, a safe environment for Kosovo Serbs remained elusive.

With the exception of Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi, most political leaders were criticized for not doing enough to stop the violence during the March riots and for

being slow to respond after the riots. However, Kosovo political leaders—including Kosovo government officials and political party leaders—have increasingly called publicly for tolerance.

In December, the media openly debated the pros and cons of wearing the traditional Islamic headscarf, spurred by two separate events. The media reported that a Kosovo Government delegation, on a trip to Germany, complained that the interpreter provided to them wore a headscarf. Consequently a part of the delegation did not want to attend scheduled meetings. The other event involved a student who was told by the principal of the high school that she could not wear a headscarf to school.

In the fall of 2003, the principal of the Pristina secondary school "Naim Frasheri" banned a student from wearing a headscarf on the school premises, and the student appealed to the Kosovo Ombudsperson. The Ministry of Education's position was that the education law stated public education institutions must refrain from activities promoting any specific religion. The student continued to attend the school wearing a headscarf, yet the principal's decision remained unchanged. On June 4, the Ombudsperson released a nonbinding opinion that the Ministry's interpretation should only apply to school teachers or officials, not students, and students should be able to wear the headscarf to school.

In June 2003, an Islamic-oriented Kosovo Albanian political party with a seat in the Kosovo Assembly undertook an initiative to install religious teaching in schools; this initiative faced resistance from many within the Assembly and did not reach the Assembly agenda.

Although they claim the situation has slightly improved, Protestants still report discrimination 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.

On August 19, 2003, the Kosovar media reported that two Christians in Ferizaj complained to the police that three individuals threatened them with "consequences" if they did not convert to Islam. The police in Ferizaj stated that the dispute was between family members; the brother and nephew of a young woman told her to convert from Christianity back to Islam. It is unclear whether these individuals were affiliated with a government organization.

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

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. Prior to the March riots, KFOR and UNMIK international police, with increasing participation of the Kosovo Police Service, reduced the number of crimes against Orthodox persons and sites; however, there have been few convictions of those who perpetrated attacks prior to March.

The number of attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches continued to decrease during the period covered by this report; however, during the March riots, 30 Orthodox religious sites and over 900 homes and businesses of ethnic minorities were burned or damaged. Members of the PISG and some political leaders made efforts to communicate with the Kosovo Serbs and Serbian Orthodox officials and expressed a public commitment to assist in their return and the reconstruction of damaged or destroyed churches. Following the March 17 and 18 riots, on April 2, Kosovo Albanian leaders issued another public letter, condemning the violence and calling for building of the tarnished interethnic relations. Although on April 15 Kosovo Prime Minister inaugurated the first rebuilt Kosovo Serb homes in Pristina, damaged during the March riots, the European Union and NATO have criticized the PISG for being slow to rebuild the razed homes. As of June 30, according to UNMIK, 70 persons were convicted and a further 270 persons have cases pending in the courts in relation to the March riots.

In July 2003, key Kosovar Albanian, Turk, Bosniak, Roma and Ashakli leaders issued a public letter calling on Kosovo Serbs to return home. This letter was supported by the Kosovo Assembly's July 10 recommendations and coincided with the

first-ever joint Kosovo President's and the head of the second-largest Kosovo Albanian political party's meeting of Kosovo Serbs in Ferizaj. An important event was also the beginning of Belgrade-Pristina dialogue on technical matters in October 2003 in Vienna, which was followed by the first technical groups meeting in Pristina on March 4. The Kosovo Prime Minister called on Kosovo Serbs for cooperation, such as the January 12 appeal to the Kosovo Serbs to join the "Standards for Kosovo" policy, and was widely praised for his attempts to stop the March riots. Nevertheless, the UN stated that approximately 2,400 Serbs and other Kosovo minorities had not returned to their homes 3 months after the ethnic Albanian riots.

Although Protestants were not initially included in the Working Group established by the Kosovo Government to draft a law governing the legal status of religious communities, they were later invited during the period covered by this report to join and provide input as an equal partner with other religions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Ethnicity and religion are closely entwined 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. At the beginning of March, Raska-Prizren Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic resigned from his semi-political position as the president of the Serbian National Council for Kosovo.

Societal violence continued during the period covered by this report. Of 109 killings in Kosovo from July 2003 through June 30, there were 24 Serb victims, including the 8 Serb victims of the March riots; although none of these killings is believed to have been religiously motivated, there were some reported incidents of rock-throwing and other assaults against Serbian Orthodox clergy, and monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly remained unable to use parts of the monasteries' properties due to concerns about safety.

On May 31, the media reported that an imam, after receiving an invitation to perform a religious ceremony in the village of Stublla, was kidnapped and assaulted by masked assailants. The imam escaped with minor injuries. The motives behind the alleged attack are unknown and an investigation is ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Security concerns had a chilling effect on the Serb community and its freedom of movement and also affected their freedom to worship, particularly after the March riots. Some Kosovo Serbs have 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. At the end of the period covered by this report, Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo, remained in a monastery in the Serbian enclave of Gracanica rather than return to the diocesan seat in Prizren; the Bishop's residence was among the religious sites burned and destroyed during the March riots. Like most Serb leaders, Bishop Artemije traveled under armed security escort. Freedom of movement suffered some setbacks following the March riots, but in general has improved since 2003, particularly in Eastern Kosovo.

Attacks on Serbian Orthodox religious sites, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, continued during the period covered by this report, although these incidents had decreased prior to the March riots. There were incidents of vandalism at religious sites. At St. Nicholas Church in Prizren, the priest claimed that after the KFOR static checkpoint was removed in 2003, the church was attacked several times, including an incident in July 2003 when the church's windows were broken. The media reported that on September 19, the St. Petka church in the village of Laplje Selo was broken into and vandalized, and objects were stolen; on September 24, a similar incident occurred at the St. Nedelja church in Brnjaca village. In January, the Orthodox leadership reported the burning of the bell tower of Stimje church.

Most serious of all incidents were the March 17–19 riots, which occurred simultaneously throughout Kosovo and left 19 persons dead, including 8 Kosovo Serbs, and more than 900 injured. The protests were sparked by events during a time of general discontent concerning UNMIK involvement in Kosovo. On March 15, a Serb was shot allegedly by Albanian youths and Serb protestors blocked the main com-

mercial road, and on March 16 three Albanian children drowned in the Ibar River, which the media alleged was caused by Serbs chasing the children. The resulting 3 days of riots resulted in intensive property damage including the destruction or damage of 30 Orthodox religious sites and more than 900 houses and businesses of ethnic minorities.

Many of the churches and monasteries burned were constructed in the 14th century and considered part of the cultural and religious heritage of the Serbs. Father Sava, of the Decan monastery, provided a comprehensive list of religious sites destroyed or damaged between March 17 and 19. The list included 33 sites altogether in the following 14 locations: Prizren, Rahovec, Gjakova, Skenderaj, Peja, Ferizaj, Kamenica, Shtime, Pristina, Fushe Kosove, Vushtrri, Obiliq, Mitrovica, 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.

In addition problems with the unfinished Serbian church located on University of Pristina grounds continued. In April 2003, the Student Union leader at Pristina University called for the removal of the unfinished Church. The Education Ministry later requested that the Pristina municipality authorities fence off university grounds and indicated that all non-university buildings—including the church—should be removed. The land on which the church sits was given to the Serbian Orthodox Church by the Serb-dominated administration in Pristina during the 1990s. On December 30, 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 was taken. 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. 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 until March, relying instead on patrols by the U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and indigenous Kosovo Police Service (KPS). In most cases, prior to March, 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 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 from KFOR to CIVPOL and KPS was halted. In some areas KFOR resumed static checkpoints and increased protective measures around religious sites and KFOR patrols were more visible. However, following the riots, sporadic attacks against ethnic minority property continued, including looting of reconstructed houses in Obilic/Obiliq and other areas and youths throwing stones at a Serbian Orthodox church near Viti/Vitina.

While previously Protestants have reported suffering violence and discrimination, during the period covered by this report, the only discrimination reported was verbal attacks and exclusion from interfaith initiatives by Islamic leadership on the grounds that Protestants do not comprise a "traditional" religion in Kosovo. The absence of attacks on the Protestants and their religious buildings during the March riots was, according to their leadership, a good sign of acceptance by the Kosovo public.

Apart from an incident during the March riots in Prizren when the rioters mistook a Catholic church for a Serbian Orthodox church and nearly attacked it, Kosovo Catholic leaders reported no problems. The 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. The Muslim community made similar remarks concerning their relationship with the Catholic leadership and lack of relationship with the Orthodox community.

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.

According to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) representative in Pristina, the Jewish community in Kosovo is very small; about 40 people from 2 families in Prizren have some Jewish roots, but there are no synagogues or Jewish institutions. The AJJDC representative reported no incidents of physical violence or harassment toward Jewish persons during the period covered by this report.

Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic religious 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.

Since 2000, the U.S. Government has provided significant funding to Radio KIM (Radio Caglavica), based at Gracanica Monastery, which broadcasts in both Serbian and Roma. Serbian Orthodox Bishop Artemije's clerical staff runs the station, and it broadcasts news, music, interviews, and cultural programs. Also, during the period covered by this report, 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 U.S. is involved actively in UNMIK, which is aimed at securing peace, facilitating refugee return and reconstruction, laying the foundations for democratic self-government, and fostering 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 riots.

The Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs funds a U.N. international police (CIVPOL) advisor in Pristina and provided $48 million (39.36 million euros) to support KPS and CIVPOL. KPS and CIVPOL have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo.

The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration funds a returns officer in Pristina $11.9 million (9.76 million euros) in returns programs for Muslim and Orthodox Roma, Orthodox Serbs, and Muslim Bosnians.

During the March riots, U.S. Office Pristina was in direct, constant communication with Orthodox religious officials and interacted with local and central government officials as necessary. The Orthodox clergy at Decan monastery credited the U.S. Office with helping to coordinate KFOR's helicopter evacuation of an injured clergy family member. The U.S. Office Pristina was also instrumental in persuading the Decan Mayor to help stop the rioting crowd from advancing on the 14th century monastery, and as a result, the monastery and church were not harmed.

In the wake of the March inter-ethnic violence, U.S. officers met with Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic religious 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. 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.

The U.S. Office has encouraged dialogue between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians on many levels, including hosting an informal dialogue organized by the NGO "Project for Ethnic Relations" on June 23.

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 a total 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 or international students. Estimates of the Muslim population vary from 500 to 5,000.

There are 3 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, 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 insignificant. There are very small numbers of refugees who practice different faiths than 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. From among the nonregistered churches, there are 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 near the Ukrainian border. 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 a poll conducted in 1998 by the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences, the number of religious practitioners increased from 73 percent in 1991 to 83 percent in 1998. 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 it has the most clergy. 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 May, the President signed a second corollary regarding religious education, which had been approved by Parliament in January. An identical agreement was signed with 11 other registered religions. This treaty mandates that all public elementary schools require children to take their (or their parents', for young children) choice of either a religion class or an ethics class. This was previously required only for students in fifth through ninth grade. Private church-run schools need not provide classes in other religions. These courses often are taught by religious leaders, and the religious groups are responsible for providing instructors, although their salaries are covered from the government budget. There is a lack of appropriate teachers for certain religions. Some representatives of religious groups complain that the status of religious lecturers is not equal with that of regular teachers. Religious lecturers usually are 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. The remaining two corollaries, including a proposal to allow Catholic government 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 discouraged by the authorities in practice. Those that register receive government benefits, including subsidies for clergymen and office expenses. 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. By law funding is based on the number of clergy, not the number of adherents, resulting in some religions with fewer members receiving more funding than those with more. In 2001, the New Apostolic Church was registered, raising the number of registered religious groups from 15 to 16.

To register a new religion, a group must submit a list of 20,000 permanent residents who adhere to that religion. The 14 religions already established before the law passed in 1991 were exempt from the 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 complained about the membership requirement, which effectively bars 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, but municipal officials continue to deny permission for the construction. City officials said this is because the land is zoned as a park; however, there appears to be confusion regarding the land in question. Members of the Muslim community also criticized the registration law, noting that the community in the Czech Republic was able to submit an application for first-tier registration

(300 or more citizen member signatures). During the period covered by this report, the only communication from a new religion that the Department of Church Affairs received was from a three-member group of Slovaks in Nitra called the Slovak Islamic Movement. Members of the Muslim community said they consider the group to be spurious.

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.

In February 2001, the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Judaism undertook a joint educational project on Jewish history and culture targeted to elementary and high school teachers of history, civic education, and ethics to educate the public about Jewish themes and increase tolerance toward minorities. The Government, as an associate member, is seeking to obtain full membership in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The project has continued to be very successful and well received. In 2002, four teachers participated in summer training programs in the United States, and in 2003 an additional teacher attended. In 2004, more teachers were scheduled to visit U.S. universities; 25 Slovak teachers visited the concentration camp in Dachau, and 20 teachers will go 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 Center was established as a joint project of the Bratislava Jewish community and the Milan Simecka Foundation. 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. However, none of these holidays appears to have a negative impact on any religious groups.

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 rerouting 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 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 some smaller faiths. The Government monitors but does not interfere with religious "cults" and "sects." 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 reg-

ister 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.

Some Scientologists have complained of harassment by the Slovak Information Service (SIS). In 2002, stories appeared in the media that were critical of companies that have ties to Scientology, including reports that the SIS director was concerned that a company with an indirect connection to the Church of Scientology had won a contract to provide the Government with a new computer system. The award was eventually cancelled, and a new one had not been announced by the end of the period covered by this report.

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. The Church exists primarily in poorer areas of the country where there is little money for restoration; it is seeking funds from abroad.

While the Orthodox Church reported that six of the seven properties on which it had filed claims already had been returned, the Catholic Church and the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic (UZZNO) reported lower rates of success. The Catholic Church reported that more than half of the property that it had claimed had been returned to it already. 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 since have been developed. 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 has reported some successful cases of restitution and has only a few pending cases that require resolution. These include cases in which property had been restituted to UZZNO but not in usable condition, cases in which the property still is occupied by previous tenants, and lands upon which buildings had been constructed after the seizure of the property.

During the year, 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 currently pays. The museum responded that it did not have the funds to pay the higher rent. There have been public relations repercussions. 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 is not among them, it was occupied by many who also perished in the concentration camps.

Following 2 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 September 2002, the Cabinet agreed to $18,747,253 (SKK 850 million) in compensation for this property. The entire amount has been placed into an account at the Slovak National Bank, and one-third has been made available immediately as needed due to the advancing age of Holocaust survivors. The Jewish community will draw interest on the account for 10 years before receiving the remaining principal. The community intends to use the funds to compensate some community members as well as to fund social, educational, and cultural programs.

In 2002, Parliament passed an amendment to Law 206, which allows compensation to Jewish Holocaust victims who lived in the country's territory when it was

occupied by Hungary. Law 305 compensates the victims or direct heirs of victims of Nazi persecution during World War II in the wartime State. The deadline for applications under the amendment was November 2002. UZZNO filed a lawsuit against Germany to reclaim compensation of $425,000 (SKK 19,269,500) that the wartime Government paid to Germany to cover the cost to deport a Jewish population of 57,000. UZZNO lost the lawsuit in January 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 exist among the major faiths, and there are several ecumenical organizations that foster closer relationships. The Ecumenical Council of Churches operates and comprises several religions. Some of the recognized religious groups formed a working group on religion and "sects," which functions as the authority on new religious movements. Former President Schuster brought together the heads of all the registered faiths for a meeting on New Year's Day to highlight previous issues successfully resolved, such as pastoral services in the military and the completion of governmental treaties with all the major faiths in the country.

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 3 years. Legislation is similar to that of neighboring countries, but court delays and insufficient legal remedies have prevented comparable improvements in the situation.

The low number of prosecutions for racially motivated crime generally improved over the past 2 years due to the creation of a specialized police unit and an advisor in the Bratislava Regional Police. Their successes included the arrest of 24 skinheads, including a major neo-Nazi organizer, at a large meeting in 2003. In another success, the Bratislava Police checked 158 suspected meeting places of extremist groups in an overnight raid, which resulted in 14 arrests. Due to this monitoring unit and its NGO advisory board, the police are better trained in identifying neo-Nazi members and more informed about their activities. Interior Minister Vladimir Palko has an advisor on racially motivated crime who participates actively on the Government's advisory commission with NGOs. This year the Ministry of Interior 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 (SNS), 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.

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.

Several Jewish cemeteries are desecrated each year, including those in Puchov, Humenne, and Kosice during the period covered by this report. Vandals usually 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 say they have been satisfied with

the Government's response to these incidents, and they do believe that the communities support this vandalism.

The Jewish community continues to protest that a lawsuit against Martin Savel, a former editor of the publishing house Agres who published anti-Semitic literature and the anti-Jewish magazine Voice of Slovakia in the early 1990s, never has been resolved due to the slowness of the courts.

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. Relations with religious groups are friendly and open.

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 has fostered an effective dialogue between religious groups, the Ministry, and the Commission for the Preservation of U.S. Heritage Abroad on matters of importance to the commission.

The Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission actively lobbied members of the Government to expedite the work of the Joint Commission on resolving the questions of heirless property taken from Holocaust victims. This work was concluded successfully during the previous 12-month period.

Embassy officers have played an active role assisting in restitution cases involving U.S. citizens and have 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 have 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 a total 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; Islam, 47,488; Jewish, 99; Oriental, 1,026; other religion, 558; Agnostic, 271; Believer, but belongs to no religion, 68,714; Unbeliever/atheist, 199,264; Did not want to 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. In response to complaints from several groups that the Office had failed to act on their registration applications, the Secretary General of the Government clarified registration procedures and instructed the Office to process outstanding applications. As of September 2003, the Office had approved 6 out of 10 pending applications. The applications pending as of the end of 2003 were for Holy Church Annasann, Traditional Catholics, Church of Holy Innocence, and a religious community referred to as "Reformed Gospel Church".

Registered religious groups, including foreign missionaries, may receive value-added tax rebates on a quarterly basis from the Ministry of Finance. All groups in the country report equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

The appropriate role for religious instruction in schools continued to be an issue of debate during the period covered by this report. 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 (restitution or compensation) of church property—church buildings and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests—that were nationalized after World War II by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. By the end of September 2003, the Government had completed 32,614 (86 percent) of the 38,156 denationalization claims filed. During the period covered by this report, the Government reallocated existing resources, including judges, to reduce the backlog.

The Roman Catholic Church was a major property holder in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II. After the war, much church property—churches and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests—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 forests in Triglav National Park to the Church; however, in 2002 the Ljubljana Administrative Court annulled this decree in response to multiple legal challenges. The Catholic Church challenged the annulment of the decree in the Supreme Court, and a portion of the forest lands was returned in late 2003.

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. The Human Rights Ombudsman was investigating complaints from several smaller religious communities that they do not receive this benefit; however, this ceased to be an issue during the reporting period. According to the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, past complaints were tied to the registration problem that was resolved when the Secretary General exerted pressure for timely registration of religious groups.

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 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 con-

fiscated after they were killed or driven from the country, and many were prominent Catholics. The current perception in the country is that this gulf is a political historical issue. 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 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 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 mayor Danica Simsic expressed support for the Mosque and the location on which it is to be built. In August 2003, the Agency for Environment granted permission to the Ljubljana Department for Urbanism to make zoning changes that would enable construction of the Mosque on the selected site. City councilor Mihael Jarc launched an initiative in December 2003 for a referendum opposing the zoning regulation change that would enable mosque construction and collected the requisite 11,000 signatures to call the referendum. Extreme supporters of the referendum effort said that the country could become a "terrorist breeding ground" if the mosque were constructed. In April Jarc stated that Muslim values are seen as somehow opposed to the Jewish, Christian and Orthodox European tradition. On April 18, the City Council voted to acknowledge the petition as legitimate and set the referendum date for May 23. Ombudsman Matjak Hanzek noted, however, that referendum gatherers used tactics asking residents to "sign a petition against the mosque" rather than a zoning change. Simsic considered the referendum to be an unconstitutional, unlawful encroachment on the constitutionally guaranteed rights of religious minorities and sent the initiative to the Constitutional Court to decide whether the referendum is in accordance with the Constitution and whether it violates basic human rights. On April 28, the Constitutional Court issued a temporary injunction halting the referendum. On June 28, the City Council voted to reverse its earlier position and support Mayor Simsic's effort to have the constitutionality of the referendum decided by the Court.

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 proclamation of May 9, 2004, as Holocaust Memorial Day. Schools carried out various activities to remember the Holocaust that day, for example, watching documentaries, written assignments and 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 during these sessions. 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 a total area of 194,897 square miles, and its population is approximately 42.7 million.

The Center for Sociological Investigation (CIS), an autonomous state agency, collects statistics on religious trends in the society. In December 2003, a CIS survey reported that 81 percent of citizens consider themselves Catholic; however, 42 percent stated that they never attend Mass. Among non-Catholics, 11.6 percent said that they were agnostics, 4.1 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 37 million Catholics in the country. The Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) represents 350,000 Spanish Protestants, but estimates that there are 800,000 foreign Protestants, mostly European, who reside in the country at least 6 months of each year. The Federation of Spanish Islamic Entities (FEERI) estimates that there are close to 1 million Muslims, including both legal and illegal immigrants. The Ministry of Interior last estimated (2002) that there are as many as 600,000 persons who had come from predominately Muslim countries. In March the National Institute of Statistics reported that, according to surveys taken in January 2003, immigrants from Morocco compose approximately 21 percent of all legal immigrants; there are 375,767 Moroccans living in the country legally. In Catalonia the Moroccan population is 126,686. The next highest concentrations of Moroccans immigrants are in Madrid (56,137), Andalusia (50,047), Valencia (30,078), Murcia (29,648), Balearic Islands (12,650), Castile La Mancha (12,168), Canary Islands (11,611), Extremadura (8,371), Aragon (7,025), and Melilla (5,857); there are fewer than 5,000 in other specific areas. However, there may also be as many as 200,000 undocumented Moroccans living in the country. Local sources report that there are 40-50,000 resident Jews. There are approximately 9,000 practicing Buddhists.

In May the Register of Religious Entities maintained by the Ministry of Justice listed 12,017 entities created by the Catholic Church, as well as 1,328 non-Catholic churches, denominations, and communities in the register, including 1,041 Protestant church entities. Protestant entities include 277 Charismatic churches, 128 Assemblies of Brothers, 255 Baptist churches, 98 Pentecostal churches, 37 Presbyterian churches, 1 Evangelical Church of Philadelphia, 10 Church of Christ churches, 1 Salvation Army entity, 18 Anglican churches, 61 interdenominational churches, 35 Churches for Attention to Foreigners, 1 Seventh-day Adventist church, 3 Reformed Adventist churches, and 120 other evangelical churches. In addition there are also 9 Orthodox entities, 4 Christian Scientist entities, 2 entities of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 entity of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 1 entity of the Unification Church, 10 entities of other Christian confessions, 16 entities of Judaism, 236 entities of Islam, 11 entities of the Baha'i Faith, 3 entities of Hinduism, 19 entities of Buddhism, and 2 entities of other confessions.

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 have not yet been made 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.

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 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 April 2003, the Government expanded the concept of "well-known deeply-rooted" beliefs (notorio arragio) to allow other religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, to sign bilateral agreements. As of the end of the reporting period, neither Jehovah's Witnesses nor Mormons had begun negotiations with the Government.

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 Federation of Israelite Communities of Spain (FCIE) and Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE), the Government agreed to recognize Jewish and Muslim holidays. The 1992 accord with FEREDE accommodates Protestants entities, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, that celebrate Saturday as the Sabbath, by giving them Friday afternoon off from work with pay.

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, such as the Church of Scientology, are treated as cultural associations. Following the court decisions of 2001 and 2002, the Church of Scientology continued to seek official status.

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.

Leaders of the Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish communities report that they are discussing 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 are seeking public financing comparable to that enjoyed by the Catholic Church. All religious minority groups have asked 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. As of the end of the reporting period, these negotiations were ongoing. 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. The CIE has proposed that it submit names of teachers of the Islamic faith for the Ministry of Justice to consider employing in secondary schools to teach the Islamic component of religious studies. The FEREDE also is pressing for more non-Catholic teachers in religious studies courses.

Public schools offer general courses in religious education covering Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Judaic themes. These courses are not mandatory. There are religious schools for Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish students.

Restrictions on Freedom of Religion

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

The Islamic Federation (FEERI) reported 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 is forced into less-visible suburban areas, primarily due to 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 have not encountered problems with school dress codes. The Government has consistently held that the right of 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 continue to report that there are no military regulations to implement the 1992 agreements. 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 11 terrorist train bombings in Madrid. Muslim leaders were concerned that media reports appeared to link the Islamic religion to the terrorist attacks. They also expressed concern over discrimination in housing and employment.

In May 2002, arsonists burned an evangelical church in the town of Arganda del Rey, in the Madrid Autonomous Community. The church, whose congregation was predominantly Romanian, previously had been vandalized with anti-immigrant graffiti. Police arrested four youths who, according to the local mayor, were associated with an ultra-right group. The four youth were not brought to trial and were later released. During the period of this report, the church was subjected to occasional attacks by unidentified, stone-throwing youth. Police officials have investigated the incidents, but they have made no arrests.

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. The vandalism included anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of the synagogue. The groups also reported that local extremist groups monitored them. The regional government responded by increasing security at the center.

On May 27, Catalan police arrested three leaders of a neo-Nazi group called the Circle of Indo-European Research (CEI). The three CEI members were arrested on charges of being members in an illicit association that opposed the fundamental rights and public freedom of citizens within the international community. The police, as well as Jewish community leaders, believed the leaders were involved in the March synagogue attacks. One was charged with illicit association; the police released one of the leaders without bail, another was released with bail, and the third was released with an order to appear in court in July.

Officials from B'nai B'rith have suggested there was an increasing anti-Semitic tone in newspaper commentary and political cartoons as well as public displays of anti-Semitism at major sporting events. They cited the example of a soccer game

held in Madrid following the March 11 train bombings. Some participants at the game wore swastikas and other Nazi emblems; they also displayed a banner with an anti-Semitic epithet.

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.

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 a total area of 173,732 square miles, and its population is an estimated 9.0 million. Approximately 79.6 percent of the population belongs to the Church of Sweden. Since the Church and the State separated in 2000, a number of people have left the Church each year. In 2003, 58,746 people left the Church. According to studies carried out by the Church of Sweden, the main reason for people leaving appears to be economic; membership means a tax of 1.19 percent of members' incomes. In 2003, the Church of Sweden baptized 67.6 percent of children, a figure that has declined steadily over the past 2 decades. Confirmations have declined even more sharply; 37.6 of Swedish children were confirmed in 2003, as opposed to 80 percent in 1970.

There are an estimated 140,000 Roman Catholics, of whom 82,000 are registered with the Church. Approximately 80 percent of Catholics in the country are foreign born, the largest groups coming from Southern Europe, Latin America, and Poland. 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 a religious ceremony to mark the turning points of life.

Those who attend Protestant churches, other than the Church of Sweden, total more than 400,000. The Pentecostal movement (Pingströrelsen) and the Missionary (or Missions) Church (Missionskyrkan) are the largest Protestant groups. In 2003, the Pentecostal movement had approximately 127,000 members.

The total number of Jewish persons living in the country is estimated to be approximately 18,500–20,000; however, the Jewish community estimates 10,000 active, or practicing, members. There are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewish synagogues. Large numbers of Jewish people attend High Holy Day services but attendance at weekly services is low.

The exact number of Muslims is difficult to estimate; however, it has increased rapidly in the past several years through immigration. The number provided by the Muslim community is approximately 300,000 to 350,000 members, of whom around 100,000 are said to be active. Muslim affiliations represented among immigrant groups are predominantly with the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam. There are mosques in many parts of the country. Buddhists and Hindus number approximately 3,000 to 4,000 persons each. Although no reliable statistics are available, it is estimated that 15 to 20 percent of the adult population are atheists.

The major religious communities and the Church of Sweden are spread across the country. Large numbers of immigrants in recent decades have led to the introduction of various world religions to Sweden, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and a number of Christian Churches other than the Church of Sweden in those commu-

nities populated by immigrants. These communities tend to be concentrated in the larger cities.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and other foreign missionary groups are also active in the country.

A large number of smaller, internationally active religions groups have established themselves 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 3,500 members), Landmark-Forum, Hare Krishna, Word of Faith (Livets Ord), members of Jehovah's witnesses, Opus Dei, 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 right 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 nondiscriminatory fashion. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private actors.

Since the separation of Church and the Government, all recognized religious denominations now receive state financial support, and those paying "church tax" may now choose to divert that to the religious organization of their choice or receive a tax reduction. 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 holidays are considered national holidays, but this does not appear to affect other religious group 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. Registration is voluntary and entitles groups to receive government aid, so long as they have a sufficient number of followers and have been established in the country for a number of years.

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 and are obliged to follow certain government guidelines.

The Office of the Ombudsman Against Ethnic Discrimination investigates individuals' or groups' 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 about the Holocaust, the Government launched nationwide Holocaust education projects. Approximately one million copies of the education project's core textbook are in circulation and available in many languages at no cost to every household with children.

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 that cooperates with the Swedish Free Church Council. Religious bodies entitled to some form of state financial assistance select SST members.

Many religious communities in the country are involved in interfaith dialogue. However, in May, the Jewish central council decided that the Jewish community should withdraw from all cooperation with the Church of Sweden after the launch of the Church's "HOPP (HOPE) campaign for a just peace in the Middle East." The campaign is endorsed by Archbishop KG Hammar and includes a recommendation to boycott Israeli goods originating from "occupied territory." The campaign will continue into 2005.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

A law is in place requiring animal slaughter to be preceded by the administration of anesthetics to minimize undue suffering of the animal. The Jewish community has protested that this prevents the practice of kosher slaughter, 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 the 1930s, a law banning kosher slaughter has been in place, meaning that the Jewish community needs to import kosher meat from abroad. The justification of the ban is that the kosher method of slaughter causes undue suffering to the animal. Jewish community leaders have openly criticized the legislation.

In October 2001, a new law became effective that regulates the circumcision of boys. The law stipulates that the 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 the Jewish mohels (persons ordained to carry out circumcision according 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. The new law is scheduled to be evaluated in 2005, 4 years after its introduction.

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.

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. 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. Therefore, there are no specific figures on incidents or crimes motivated by religious prejudice or intolerance toward members of the Muslim community.

The number of reported anti-Semitic crimes has increased since the end of the nineties, and has averaged around 130 annually during the period 2000-2003, with 128 crimes reported in 2003. The two largest categories of anti-Semitic crime in 2003 were agitation against 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 members of the Jewish community 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 no longer sees its primary threats coming from neo-nazis but from Islamic and leftist extremists. In March, four young people 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 Jewish person. 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 a football match ended with Jewish players being attacked by Muslim Somali players.

Since 2001 there have been two instances of Islamic schools being subjected to arson attacks and mosques receiving bomb threats. Representatives of the Muslim community report that during the period covered by this report a veiled woman was assaulted by a hysterical woman.

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 mem-

ber 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 a total 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 the Protestant Church, the two predominant denominations, 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. Over 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, over 95 percent of the population had been split evenly between the Protestant 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 Government'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, Hindi, and other); 11.1 percent no formal creed.

According to official statistics, the Muslim population has doubled to more than 310,000 over the past several years, but independent sources believe an additional 150,000 Muslims may be residing illegally in the country. 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 Ahmadayyia 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 reformists. About 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 religion are separated) financially support at least one of the three traditional denominations—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 denominations enjoy, to the Jewish community. Islamic and other nonofficial religious groups are excluded from these benefits.

In November 2003, voters in Zurich rejected an amendment to the 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. The debates on a reform of the relations between Church and State, as well as the official recognition of the Jewish community, continue in the context of the ongoing complete revision of the Zurich cantonal constitution.

A religious organization must register with the Government in order to receive tax-exempt status.

In May 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 only appointed an ambassador-at-large "in special mission" to the Holy See in 1991. The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches expressed unease over the Government's action because the latter did not consult them on the issue.

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, that he or she would be supported financially by the host organization, and that the country of origin of religious workers also grants visas to Swiss religious workers. The number of working visas awarded to foreign imams increased from 7 to 10 between 2002 and 2003.

Religious education is taught in most public cantonal schools, with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel. The doctrine generally depends on which religion predominates in the particular canton, but some schools cover other religious groups living in the country. A new religious tutorial printed in Lausanne in the fall of 2003 and distributed to French-speaking primary schools in Fribourg, Bern, Wallis, and Jura created controversy among Roman Catholic parliamentarians in the canton of Wallis because it presented Christianity and Islam on an equal footing. The local section of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) criticized the book's version of Islam because it did not mention radical Muslim practices such as Shari'a and stoning. Arguing that 95 percent of the Wallis population was Roman Catholic, the SVP submitted a petition with 2,000 signatures to the cantonal chancellery asking that the book be withdrawn, and they also threatened to launch a popular initiative as an alternative solution. Other cantons using the book have not made similar complaints.

Those of different faiths are free to attend classes for their own creeds during the class period. Atheists are not required to attend the classes. Parents also may send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by their church, or they may teach their children at home.

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 2002, a Federal Service for the Combating of Racism to coordinate antiracism activities of the Federal Administration with cantonal and communal authorities. This Federal Service has a budget of $11.1 million (15 million Swiss francs) to use over a 5-year period. Of this money, $370,000 (500,000 Swiss francs) per year was reserved for the establishment of new local consultation centers where victims of racial or religious discrimination may seek assistance. Approximately 130 of these consultation centers or contact points already exist in the country. In addition the Federal Service for the Combating of Racism sponsors and manages a vari-

ety of projects to combat racism, including some projects specifically addressing the problem of anti-Semitism.

On May 3, the Cabinet decided to retain the national anthem, although it acknowledged that the anthem's text is outdated and overtly religious and sexist. The Cabinet also rejected a parliamentary request to drop the "Swiss Psalm," which was written in 1841 and has in recent years been the target of considerable criticism. Among the controversial aspects of the anthem are its explicitly religious lyrics, such as "the pious soul recognizes God in the noble fatherland," and its exclusion of female citizens.Of the country's 16 largest political parties, only 4 (the Evangelical People's Party, the Christian Democratic 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. Some religious or spiritual groups have organized their own parties, such as the Transcendental Meditation Maharishi's Party of Nature and the Argentinean Guru's Humanistic Party. However, none of these groups have a large enough following to win political representation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In several cases between 1995 and 2000, the Federal Tribunal (the country's Supreme Court) consistently ruled that the Church of Scientology is a primarily commercial, rather than religious, entity.

In April 2003, the Federal Tribunal ruled that it was constitutional to refuse a license to run a private school to a body affiliated with the Church of Scientology because of the latter's controversial nature, a stance the court had already taken in 1993 and 1996. The Federal Tribunal thus upheld a decision of the Lucerne cantonal government to close a private primary school run by a woman formally associated with the Church of Scientology.

On April 7, the Geneva Cantonal Government confirmed its decision to fire public school teacher Hani Ramadan, a Muslim cleric, despite a contradictory court ruling. Ramadan had been suspended from teaching since October 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). Nevertheless, Ramadan will be entitled to financial damages, which have yet to be set.

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 was filed in July 2003 with the Swiss chancellery collecting 117,113 signatures, well above the required 100,000-signature threshold. If passed, the proposed bill would prohibit the importation of meat from animals bled without stunning. It is not yet clear whether such regulation would in effect prohibit local religious minorities from practicing their religion. The popular initiative has yet to be reviewed by 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The country participated in the April 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.

The Swiss Observatory of Religions based in Lausanne believes that anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic feelings have increased over the last decade. 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. The few journalists that engaged in anti-Zionist rhetoric later apologized. Nevertheless, other xenophobic and revisionist publications exist, sometimes using Internet web sites based in the United States to avoid prosecution.

According to statistics gathered by the Foundation Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, the total of reported incidents against foreigners or minorities was 107 in 2003, down from 121 incidents recorded in 2002. These figures include instances of verbal and written attacks, which were much more frequent than physical assaults. According to the Federal Statistics Office, 24 persons were convicted in 2002 under the 1995 anti-racism law (down from 38 convictions in 2001), whereas 3 persons were sentenced for interfering with religious freedom or freedom to worship (down from 4 convictions in 2001).

A study released by the Zurich University on March 26 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.

On April 26, the Zurich lawyer and honorary chairman of the Jewish religious community, Sigi Feigel, sued the political party Europa Partei Schweiz by 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 party is being charged under antiracism laws.

On January 27, schools across the country held a day of remembrance for victims of the Holocaust. 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 is 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 only required to register if their earnings reach approximately $74,000 (100,000 Swiss francs). Swiss Muslims in Geneva complained in April 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.

The Federal Office of Immigration, Integration, and Emigration 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 include mandatory training for all immigrants 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 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.

During the period covered by this report, the canton of Geneva started a series of consultations to change its religious cantonal law, but the political climate surrounding the issue was not appropriate for a vote.

Other religious customs such as sexual mutilation of children, forced marriage, or "repudiation" of a marriage are illegal. In July 2000, the Federal Tribunal ruled that a unilateral repudiation by a Muslim man against his wife could not be recognized because it contravened the country's values of justice and the basic rights of a defendant to appeal.

In April 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 when police arrested eight foreign nationals suspected of links to the May 2003 terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia. Hafid Ouardiri, spokesman for Geneva's Islamic Cultural Foundation, said he was "terrified" that people would mistakenly link Islam with extremism. The Federal Refugee Office 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. It 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.

On April 10, a Muslim shop selling religious Islamic objects in Basle was destroyed by arson. Police officials could find no reason for the crime. The investigation continued at the end of the period covered by this report.

There have been no reports of difficulties for Muslims buying or renting space to worship. Although occasional complaints arise, such as a Muslim employee not being given time to pray during the workday, attitudes generally are tolerant toward Muslims.

The debate over a new French law adopted in March that banned all ostentatious religious signs from public school did not affect the country, largely because religious matters are managed at the local level by the cantons. Nevertheless, the debate received extensive coverage in the media, and many cantonal officials expressed concerns over the need to avoid tensions in public schools.

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 restrictions.

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 Muslim extremism, a concern shared by much of the general population. The Government monitors the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political. Members of the organization Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Emancipation), an extremist Islamic organization, were subject to arrest and imprisonment for subversion. During the period covered by this report, northern regional authorities closed three mosques. The Government, including President Imomali Rahmonov, continued to enunciate a policy of active secularism, which it tends to define in antiextremist rather than nonreligious terms.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some religious minority 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 between, but also within, faiths through public di-

plomacy efforts. In addition the Ambassador meets regularly with community leaders of different confessions.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 55,300 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.8 million. An estimated 95 percent of citizens consider themselves Muslims, although the degree of religious observance varies widely. An estimated 30 to 40 percent of the rural population and 5 to 10 percent of the urban population regularly follow Muslim practices (such as daily prayer and dietary restrictions) 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 (two), Jehovah's Witnesses (one), and Lutherans (no data on registered organizations). Other religious minorities are very small and include Baha'is (four registered organizations), Zoroastrians (no data on registered organizations), Hare Krishna (one registered organization), and Jews (one registered organization). Each of these groups is estimated to total less than 1 percent of the population. 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. The overwhelming majority of these groups live in the capital or other large cities.

Christian missionaries from Western countries, Korea, India, and other countries are present, but their numbers are quite small. The number of Christian converts since independence is estimated to be approximately 2,000 persons. 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. One U.S. Muslim organization began working in Khujand and Dushanbe during this reporting period.

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, and the Government monitors the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political. Members of the extremist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir were subject to arrest and imprisonment for subversion.

Although there is no official state religion, the Government has declared two Islamic holidays, Id Al-Fitr and Idi Qurbon, 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 Muslim groups, the Russian Orthodox Church, and other religious establishments. While the official reason given to justify 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 with local authorities. According to the SCRA, local authorities may object to the registration of a place of worship only if the proposed structure is not in accordance with sanitation or building codes, located on public land, or immediately adjacent to government buildings, schools, or other places of worship. If the local government objects to a proposal, it 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 administratively fined. 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, as well as closures of unregistered mosques.

The Council of Islamic Scholars, technically a nongovernmental body, governs Islamic theology and education in the country and approves appointments of imams and imam-khatibs; however, the Council's charter and membership are subject to SCRA approval. Some prominent religious figures reportedly have voiced disapproval with the quality of religious education implemented by the Council.

Approximately 2,500 mosques are registered for daily prayers. So-called "Friday mosques" (large facilities built for Friday prayers) must be registered with the SCRA. There are 213 such mosques registered, not including Ismaili places of worship because complete data were unavailable. 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 strongly defended "secularism," which in the country's political context is a politicized term that carries the strong connotation—likely understood both by the President and his audience—of being "antiextremist" 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 stated that the State is secular and that citizens may be members of political parties formed on a religious basis, 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 Islamic Renaissance Party in regional and district parliaments around the country. The IRPT was incorporated into the Government at the end of the Civil War and is the only legal Islamic political party in Central Asia.

There are small private publishers that publish Islamic materials without serious problems. There is no restriction on the distribution or possession of the Koran, the Bible, or other religious works. The IRPT continued to publish its official newspaper, "Najot" (founded in 1999). The party also publishes "Naison," a magazine for women, and "Safinai Umed," a journal targeting youth. All of these publications are printed at a private press because state-run publishing houses refuse to print IRPT materials, apparently for political reasons. The Union of Islamic Scientists of Tajikistan publishes the weekly journal "Tamaddun." Privately owned mass-circulation newspapers regularly published articles explaining Islamic beliefs and practices.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government did not explicitly ban, prohibit, or discourage specific religions; however, local authorities in some cases used the registration requirement in attempt to prevent the activity of some groups. The Government has banned the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which has developed a significant following among the ethnic Uzbek population in the north, with signs of an increased following among Tajiks in and around Dushanbe as well as in the Kulyob area of the southern Khatlon oblast. This movement operates underground and calls for a nonviolent overthrow of secular governments and the establishment of a theocratic, borderless, Islamic Caliphate.

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 during 2002, although many remained open as "teahouses" or other public facilities where observant Muslims go to talk and pray. The Government is no longer actively pursuing a registration campaign, so mosque closures have declined. In August and September 2002, authorities in the northern Sughd region closed a number of unregistered mosques in the districts of Isfara and Jabbarasulov. Most of these mosques registered with the Government and were officially reopened; eight remained "closed," although congregants continued to pray there. During Ramadan in 2002, city authorities in Dushanbe informed several "teahouses" that they would need to register as mosques; officials did not restrict activities at these teahouses while the registration applications were pending.

In July and August 2002, government officials in Sughd oblast first carried out an "attestation" of all imams in the region, through which all imams were tested on their knowledge of Islamic teachings and religious principles. Although the test was designed by the Council of Islamic Scholars, technically a nongovernmental body, it was approved by the SCRA, which enforced the results of the test. As a result, 15 imams were removed from their posts; 3 of the imams were members of the IRPT and were removed for that reason. Local observers alleged that the Government used the testing process as a means to silence certain politically outspoken religious figures. In Sughd oblast, mosques that registered allegedly signed an agreement declaring, "I will use our organization only for religious ends. I will not be a member of a party, and will not assist them." This agreement has proven to be sufficient for the Government; no additional attestation took place during the period covered by this report.

There were reports that some local officials have forbidden members of the Islamic Renaissance Party to speak in mosques in their region. However, this restriction is more a reflection of political rather than religious differences.

There have been 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. 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 the statement that "Tajikistan is a secular country."

In May 2003, local authorities in Tursunzade, a city just outside of the capital Dushanbe, dispersed a Jehovah's Witnesses gathering in one parishioner's apartment for violation of the religion law's provisions on registration and private religious education. The judge in the case fined the owner of the apartment $17 (50 somoni) and issued an order banning any gathering of more than two Jehovah's Witnesses in the city unless they registered the apartment as a place of worship with the Tursunzade city government and the SCRA. The court case seems to have been resolved quietly, with no further appeals. The Jehovah's Witnesses are working with the local and national authorities to register their apartment. In November 2002, a Baptist was tried in a northern region and fined $8 (25 somoni) after his neighbors complained that he was holding evangelical services in the courtyard of his home. He filed an appeal, but according to the central Baptist church, he has since left the country.

Missionaries of registered religious groups legally were not restricted and proselytized openly. Missionaries are not particularly welcomed by local communities, and some religious groups experienced harassment in response to evangelical activities. The Government's concern about Islamic extremists prompted it to restrict visas for Muslim missionaries. There was evidence of an unofficial ban on foreign missionaries who were perceived as Islamic extremists.

An executive decree generally prohibits Government publishing houses from publishing anything in Arabic script, but they have done so in special cases. They generally do not publish religious literature, but have done so on occasion, including copies of the Koran using Arabic script. 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 Hizb ut-Tahrir.

The Government continued restrictions on pilgrims undertaking the hajj during the period covered by this report, mandating that pilgrims travel by air. The Government stated that it made the decision because no tour operators in the country could meet Saudi government safety and hygiene regulations for buses carrying pilgrims and to ensure that the instability in Iraq would not put pilgrims at risk. There were no quotas on the total number or regional origin of pilgrims. A total of 5,000 citizens made the pilgrimage (out of a Saudi-imposed limit of 5,900), which was an increase of 2,000 compared with the previous hajj. This increase is likely due to an increase in air connections and a general improvement in the country's economic situation.

Authorities in Isfara continued to impose restrictions on private Arabic language schools (to include restrictions on private Islamic instruction) stemming from past reports that one such school was hosting a suspected terrorist. In addition restrictions on home-based Islamic instruction remained in place. While these restrictions were reportedly due to political concerns, they affected religious instruction.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to detain and try on charges of subversion numerous members of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the northern, primarily ethnic Uzbek, Sughd region, as well as increasing numbers of ethnic Tajiks in and around Dushanbe and in Khatlon Oblast, particularly around Kulyob. These measures primarily were a reac-

tion to the group's political agenda of overthrowing the Government with a theocratic Islamic Caliphate. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir asserts that it intends to accomplish this by nonviolence, officials are concerned by its alleged links to terrorist organizations, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). According to press reports, approximately 45 Hizb ut-Tahrir members were arrested during the period covered by this report. Most of these persons were sentenced to between 1 and 4 years' imprisonment, but some received sentences of up to 18 years' imprisonment. There were reports of serious irregularities in trials and abuse in detention of Hizb ut-Tahrir members, although such reports were also common in other legal proceedings.

During the period covered by this report, both the Dushanbe Synagogue and the Grace Sunmin Church experienced administrative difficulties with the city government. The synagogue is located in a section of the city slated for urban renewal, and the community has been asked to leave the location. The U.S. Ambassador intervened several times. He emphasized to government officials the importance the U.S. places on the issue, and he was able to obtain credible assurance that a compromise would be reached. The city authorities and the Jewish congregation have apparently agreed on a new location. Grace Sunmin church bought a building at a discounted price under their designation as a "labor collective." The city authorities sued for repayment of the 30 percent discount based on the price of the building after the Grace Sunmin church performed renovations; however, the city lost its court case. While these cases may initially appear to be religiously motivated, it has been determined that both are cases of bureaucratic, rather than ideological, problems.

There were reports that authorities subjected members of Islamic institutions and the political opposition to increasing pressure during the period of this report. In May 2003, the Government arrested Shamsiddin Shamsiddinov, the IRPT's Deputy Chairman for Cultural Affairs, and charged him with murder and other "grave crimes," according to press statements by the national Military Prosecutor's office. In mid-January, he was sentenced to 16 years in prison. The IRPT stated that it believed these arrests were motivated politically as efforts to discredit the IRPT, but it did not allege that this was part of any 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

Officials suspended prohibitions against the use of loudspeakers for the daily call to prayer in Dushanbe and certain areas of the Khatlon and Sughd regions. These prohibitions were issued by the mayors' offices in each area in 2001, but were apparently not based on any central directive.

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, a Baptist missionary was killed in his church in Isfara. A police investigation uncovered two suspects, one of whom fled the country. The other was arrested, but not been tried at the end of the period covered by this report.

In May 2003, fires occurred in at least two mosques and the homes of two imams in the Isfara district in the northern region. Responsibility for these acts was unclear, although local authorities reportedly instructed one of the imams to tell any inquiring journalists that the fire in his house was due to an electrical short circuit. The Sughd regional fire department said in a press statement that an arson investigation was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

In November 2003, unknown individuals scattered pages torn from the Koran along the streets of the village of Chorkuh, a village known for a high concentration

of devout Muslims. The motivation is unclear, with some speculating that it was an attempt to spark Muslim hatred for other religions. There was no known backlash.

The small Baha'i community generally did not experience prejudice; however, two Baha'i residents of Dushanbe were shot and killed in 2001. A police investigation determined that both men were killed because of their religion. In fall 2002, the Government arrested approximately 40 persons in connection with these killings; in November 2002, the Government formally charged 3 of these individuals with the murders, 1 of whom also was charged with the 1999 murder of a leader of Dushanbe's Baha'i community. Police alleged that the suspects killed the three men because of their religion and that they were aligned with Iran. During the period covered by this report, all three were sentenced to prison for the murders.

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.

Through public diplomacy, the U.S. Embassy has supported programs designed to create a better understanding of how democracies address the issue of secularism and religious freedom.

The Embassy also has investigated actively allegations of religious abuse by the city government, observing judicial processes for Grace Sunmin Church and facilitating meetings between the head of the Jewish community and the city government.

The Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner for prominent Islamic figures and scholars. The overriding message was that of promoting religious tolerance, not only between religions but also within.

To ensure community support for the Embassy's development programs, USAID conducted a "Mullahs on the Bus" tour of some of its program sites. This tour ensured that shapers of Islamic opinion were familiar with all U.S. development programs and could see the positive results achieved by U.S. assistance.

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 improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Nevertheless, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is faced some restrictions and occasional harassment, including detention for alleged proselytizing or unauthorized meetings. The Government continued to oppose "Islamic fundamentalism." Authorities continue 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. 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. Some members of non-Muslim religious groups claim that they have limited career prospects in government or military service, particularly as military officers, judges, or prosecutors.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 301,383 square miles, and its population is approximately 67.8 million. Approximately 99 percent of the population is officially Muslim, the majority of whom are Sunni. 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—and counts the rest of the population as Muslim, although other non-Muslim communities exist. The level of religious observance varies throughout the country, in part due to the strong secularist approach of the Government. In addition to the

country's Sunni Muslim majority, there are an estimated 5 to 12 million Alevis, 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. Alevi rituals include men and women worshipping together through oratory, poetry, and dance. The Government considers Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; however, some Alevis and radical Sunnis maintain Alevis are not Muslims. In several areas of western Anatolia, there is also a small group of Muslims, sometimes referred to 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, 25,000 Jews, and less than 3,000 Greek Orthodox Christians. The Government interprets the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as granting special legal minority status exclusively to these three groups. However, this 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, 3,000 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) insurrection, many Syriacs migrated to Istanbul, Western Europe, or North 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.

There are no known estimates of the number and religious affiliation of 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; 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. The state bureaucracy has played the role of defending traditional Turkish secularism throughout the history of the Republic. In some cases, elements of the bureaucracy 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 its Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which reports directly to 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.

Some religious groups, particularly the Greek and Armenian Orthodox communities, have lost property to the Government in the past or continue to fight against such losses. Many such properties were lost because current laws allow the Vakiflar to assume direct administration of properties that fall into disuse when the size of the local non-Muslim community dwindles. Other properties that were held in the name of individual community members were expropriated after the community members emigrated or died without heirs.

In 2002, the Government adopted a reform measure allowing, in principle, non-Muslim foundations to acquire property for the first time since 1936. However, the measures are restricted to the 161 minority foundations recognized by the Vakiflar and to cases in which the foundations can demonstrate a renewed community need. A number of foundations criticized the application process as lengthy and burdensome. By the end of the period covered in this report, the vast majority of petitions to recover properties expropriated by the State had been rejected or deferred due to what authorities asserted was a lack of documentation. In June, representatives of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Turkey met Prime Minister Erdogan to discuss difficulties with property ownership and other longstanding problems facing non-Muslim communities.

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. However, some Christian churches have been defaced, including in the Tur Abdin area of the southeast where many ancient Syriac churches are found, and communities often have been unable to make repairs due to lack of resources. During the period covered by this report, Syriac Christians in Mardin Province were able to begin restoration projects on some churches.

Alevis freely practice their beliefs and build "Cem houses" (places of gathering). Many Alevis allege discrimination in the Government's failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools, which reflect Sunni Muslim doctrines. They also charge a bias in the Diyanet, which views Alevis as a cultural rather than religious group; the Diyanet does not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership. During a September visit to Germany, Prime Minister Erdogan told reporters that "Alevism is not a religion" and said Alevi Cem houses are "culture houses" rather than "temples."

The Caferis, Turkey'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, like 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, the Government 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), a military and civilian body established by the 1982 Constitution to advise senior leadership on national security matters, categorizes religious fundamentalism as a threat to public safety.

According to the human rights organization Mazlum-Der and other groups, some government ministries have dismissed or barred from promotion civil servants suspected of "anti-state" or "Islamist" activities. Additionally, reports by Mazlum-Der, the media, and others indicate that the military regularly dismisses religiously observant Muslims from the service. Allegedly such dismissals are based on behavior that the military believes identifies these individuals as "Islamic fundamentalists," which they fear indicates disloyalty to the secular State. According to Mazlum-Der, the military has charged individuals with "lack of discipline" for activities that include performing Muslim prayers or being married to women who wear headscarves.

Mystical Sufi and other religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats) have been banned officially since the mid-1920s. The military ranks tarikats among the most harmful threats to "secularism"; however, tarikats remain active and widespread. The NSC has called for stricter enforcement of the ban as part of its campaign against the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Nevertheless, 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 sometimes open cases against Christians for holding unauthorized gatherings.

In May a Diyarbakir court acquitted Ahmet Guvener, pastor of the Diyarbakir Evangelical Church, in the opening hearing of his trial on multiple charges of operating an "illegal" church. The prosecutor told the court that Guvener's actions no longer constituted a crime due to international law and recent Turkish legal reforms. The church has faced repeated, arbitrary legal challenges, including many relating to zoning regulations, by the Government since its 1994 opening. In May, a local board charged with protecting cultural and historic sites rejected an application by the church to have its property zoned as a place of worship. The board stated that the church did not meet zoning regulations requiring that places of worship be situated on at least 2,500 square meters of property. Church members maintained that only one of 175 mosques in Diyarbakir met that standard.

An 2001 circular from the Ministry of Interior encouraged some provincial governors to use existing laws, such as those regulating meetings, religious building zoning, and education, to regulate gatherings of "Protestants, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, Believers in Christ" within their provinces, while "bearing in mind" those provisions of the law that provide for freedom of religion. According to one Protestant group, as well as reports by the media and other observers, local authorities asked more than a dozen churches in Istanbul and elsewhere to close. Other churches experienced increased police harassment following the publication of the circular. Several Protestant groups that have engaged in religious activities, including worship, Bible study, and religious education, had charges filed against them for zoning violations.

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 authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, acknowledging him only as head of the country's Greek Orthodox community; however, the Government does not interfere with his travels or other ecumenical activities. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul continues to seek to reopen the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli in the Sea of Marmara. The seminary has been closed since 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 February, the Vakiflar expropriated an orphanage on the Prince's Islands that had belonged to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, asserting that it was unused and had fallen into disrepair. Patriarchate representatives note, however, that they had been willing to repair the historically significant property but had refused to do so while their legal ownership was being challenged. Also, by the end of the period covered in this report, the Patriarchate was unable to receive permission to repair churches, including one damaged in the 1999 earthquake and another in the terrorist bombings carried out in Istanbul in November 2003.

In March, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I appointed six non-Turkish citizen metropolitans to the church's Holy Synod, representing the first time in the 80-year history of the Republic of Turkey that noncitizens had been appointed to the body. Although the Synod has met four times since these appointments, at the end of the period covered by this report, the Government was still conducting a legal analysis of the unprecedented move.

No law explicitly prohibits proselytizing or religious conversions; however, many prosecutors and police regard proselytizing and religious activism with suspicion, especially when such activities are deemed to have political overtones. Police occasionally bar Christians from handing out religious literature and sometimes arrest proselytizers for disturbing the peace, "insulting Islam," conducting unauthorized educational courses, or distributing literature that has criminal or separatist elements. Courts usually dismiss such charges. 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.

In October, three members of the Nationalist Movement Party in Bursa Province were charged with severely beating Yakup Cindilli, a convert to Christianity, for

distributing copies of The New Testaments. Cindilli was in a coma for 40 days after the attack. In March, the court trying the case postponed hearings for 15 months on the grounds that such a period of time was needed before a medical evaluation could be conducted to determine the full extent of Cindilli's injuries.

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 not permitted to register for classes. Many secular Turkish women accuse Islamists of using advocacy for wearing the headscarf as a political tool and say they fear that efforts to remove the headscarf ban will lead to pressure against women who choose not to wear a head covering. In October 2003, Istanbul University prevented a visiting foreign professor from entering the campus for a conference because she was wearing a headscarf. Also in October 2003, President Sezer excluded the covered wives of government ministers and Members of Parliament from the guest list for the traditional presidential Republic Day reception. In November 2003, a judge in Ankara ordered a defendant out of the courtroom because she was wearing a headscarf. Opponents of the headscarf ban staged a number of nonviolent protests against the policy during the period covered by this report.

In June, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg ruled that Turkish universities have the right to ban Muslim headscarves.

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. 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 that enroll their children in imam hatip schools do so to expose them to more extensive religious education, not to train them as imams. In May, President Sezer vetoed a bill that would have eliminated the disadvantage faced by graduates of imam hatip schools (and other vocational schools) seeking to enroll in the full range of university social sciences programs. Sezer stated that the bill violated the "principles of secularism." Prime Minister Erdogan criticized the President for "preventing equal opportunity in education."

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 Koran classes on weekends and during summer vacation. Many Koran courses function unofficially. Unlike in past years, police and Jandarma did not close any unauthorized Koran courses during the period covered by this report. Only children 12 and older legally may register for official Koran courses, and Mazlum-Der reports that police often raid illegal courses for younger children.

The 1923 Lausanne Treaty exempts religious minorities—which the State interprets as referring to Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians, and Jews—from Islamic religious and moral instruction in the public schools upon written notification of their non-Muslim background. These students may attend Muslim religious courses with parental consent. Others, such as Catholics, Protestants, and Syriac Christians, are not exempted legally; however, in practice they may obtain exemptions. The minorities recognized under the Lausanne Treaty are permitted to operate schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The curriculum of these schools includes Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish instruction. There have been reports that authorities have refused to allow children to attend minority schools in cases where one parent is Muslim and the other is not Muslim.

In April 2003, an appeals court upheld a ruling allowing the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate to retain control of an Armenian Orthodox Church in Kirikhan, Hatay Province. Church officials in May 2003 formed a foundation to take charge of the property. Authorities had sought to expropriate the church because the local Armenian Orthodox community had dwindled in numbers.

In December 2003, local authorities in Edirne rescinded a longstanding order to expropriate a sacred site of the Baha'i community. At the end of the period covered in this report, members of the Baha'i community were seeking authorization to renovate the property from a local board responsible for protection of cultural and national wealth.

In April 2003, Mersin police arrested 12 members of Jehovah's Witnesses for allegedly holding an illegal meeting in a private home after being notified in 2002 that they would no longer be allowed to use a rented Kingdom Hall due to zoning laws. When the group planned in May 2003 to hold services in an old Kingdom Hall, police reportedly threatened to close down the Hall if it was used, then attended the next 17 meetings at the Hall, taking notes. In September, a court acquitted the 12 members of Jehovah's Witnesses. On several occasions during the period covered by this report, members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mersin and Istanbul were fined for conducting religious meetings without permission.

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. Authorities in Mardin and Sirnak provinces reportedly denied permission to restore historic Syrian Orthodox churches and buildings on zoning grounds. 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.

Although religious affiliation is listed on national identity cards, there is officially no discrimination based upon religious persuasion. Some religious groups, such as the Baha'i, allege that they are not permitted 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 types of religious affiliation that can be listed on the cards. Conversion to another religion entails amending one's identification card; there are reports that those who convert from Islam to another religion have been subject to harassment by local officials when they seek amendment of their cards. Some who are not Muslim maintain that listing religious affiliation on the cards exposes them to discrimination and harassment.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported increasing official harassment over meeting for worship due to the fact that they are not members of an officially recognized religion. Members also have reported some difficulties in claiming conscientious objector status and exemption from required military service. Jehovah's Witnesses who are conscripted into the military refuse to take the military oath or carry weapons and have faced arrest and detention as a result; generally the detention lasts for about a month, after which the individual is released pending trial.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Christian groups sometimes encounter difficulty in organizing. The authorities periodically detain Turkish and foreign Christians on charges of holding unauthorized gatherings.

In June 2003, an Istanbul court acquitted 13 Ahmadi Muslims, members of a small religious community, who had been arrested in 2002 and charged under Article 7 of the Anti-Terror Law for involvement with an organization "with terrorist aims." The case was under appeal at the end of the period covered in this report.

During 2003, Bulent Bozdogen, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, was reportedly tried on two separate occasions and sentenced to a total of 3 months in military prison on charges related to his refusal to serve in the military. During the period, he was reportedly beaten and mistreated numerous times.

Members of a Protestant church in Kecioren, Ankara, claimed local residents opposed to their presence repeatedly threatened them, attempted to attack church members, and vandalized the church. They said police were dismissive of their reports; church members filed a complaint against the local police chief. In September 2003, church members opened a case against the alleged organizer of the harassment; however, the suspect remained at large and the threats and vandalism continued.

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

In November, simultaneous suicide terrorist attacks against two of Istanbul's major synagogues killed 23 and wounded over 300, including many passersby. Five days later, similar attacks against the British Consulate and the HSBC bank Istanbul headquarters also took place in Istanbul. Reports of the ongoing investigation suggest that the bombers and accomplices may have had assistance and support from al-Qa'ida.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In June 2003, Parliament approved an amendment to the Act on Construction replacing the word "mosques" with "houses of worship," in theory removing a legal obstacle to the establishment of non-Muslim religious facilities. The law gives local officials the authority to determine whether there is a need for such a place of worship in the community. Members of Christian groups reported that local authorities often rejected applications or failed to designate zones where religious facilities could be constructed. In some cases authorities have used the measure to challenge the legality of existing places of worship of communities that are not Muslim. Members of Christian groups said their applications to build new churches or have existing churches re-zoned as places of worship were sometimes rejected because their churches failed to meet regulations requiring places of worship to be situated on at least 2,500 square meters of property, even though most local mosques failed to meet that standard. In December 2003, the Interior Ministry issued a circular summarizing the legal amendments and directing provincial governors to "facilitate" efforts by religious communities to open places of worship.

In January, the Government abolished the Minorities Subcommittee, established by secret regulation in 1962 to monitor minorities as potential threats to the country, and replaced it with the Board to Assess Problems of Minorities. (The new board regulation was also secret, though it was leaked to the press.) Unlike the Subcommittee, the new board does not include representatives from military and intelligence agencies. According to the Government, the board will work to support the rights of non-Muslims.

In March, authorities approved an application by a group of German-speaking Christians to establish a religious/charity association in Alanya, Antalya Province. In the past, authorities have routinely rejected such applications on the grounds that the Act on Associations prohibits associations based on religion.

Members of the Christian community reported that the Government revised school textbooks in response to complaints about inaccurate, negative references to Christianity. They said the revised versions represent a significant improvement.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Government policy and the officially tolerant relationship among religions in society contribute to religious freedom; however, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is face societal suspicion and mistrust. Jews and Christians from most denominations freely practice their religions and report little discrimination in daily life. However, there were regular reports that 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 have published anti-Christian messages. In April, an Ankara State Security Court sentenced Kerim Akbas of Baskent TV to 23 months' imprisonment for inciting attacks against local Protestants and their places of worship. The court convicted Akbas for a series of broadcasts claiming Protestants were bribing Muslims to convert and attempting to disturb the peace. The ruling was under appeal at the end of the period covered by this report. Following the broadcasts, vandals damaged several local Protestant facilities.

In March, two bombers attacked an Istanbul Masonic Lodge, killing two and wounding seven. Turks widely believe that Masons in Turkey have Zionist and anti-Islamic tendencies. Evidence gathered in the subsequent investigation suggests that anti-Semitism was at least a partial motivating factor in the attack. According to press reports, one of the suspects later arrested also confessed to the August 2003 murder of a Jewish dentist in Istanbul. Reports also suggest that the perpetrator of this hate crime used his victim's address book and subsequently telephoned a number of Jewish board members of an Istanbul retirement home and threatened them with violence.

Many non-Muslim religious group members, along with many in the secular political majority of Muslims, fear the possibility of Islamic extremism and the involvement of even moderate Islam in politics. Several Islamist newspapers regularly publish anti-Semitic material.

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 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 February, 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 meetings with Cabinet members to encourage an agreement on the reopening of Halki.

In June, President Bush met with President Sezer and discussed the importance of maintaining the tradition of religious freedom. President Bush acknowledged the country's religious diversity and stressed the importance of maintaining it.

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. The Ambassador held an Iftar dinner with government officials and others. Diplomats from the Embassy and Consulates also hosted Iftar dinners and met regularly with representatives of the various religious groups. These meetings covered a range of topics, including the Baha'i property in Edirne, the beating of Christian convert Yakup Cindilli, problems faced by non-Muslim groups, and the debate over the role of Islam in the country.

The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed religious freedom for Muslims and religious minorities with the head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in Washington. In March, an official from the Office of International Religious Freedom traveled to the country to meet with Diyanet officials and representatives of Muslim and Christian communities.

Representatives from the Embassy and Adana Consulate attended trials involving religious issues, including the above-mentioned trials of Diyarbakir Pastor Ahmet Guvener and the alleged organizer of the harassment of the Protestant church in Kecioren, Ankara.

The Mission utilizes 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. Amendments to the law on religious organizations adopted in March 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). All groups must register in order to gain legal status with the Government. Until recently the only religions that were registered successfully were Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity, which are controlled by the Government; by the end of the period covered by this report, four minority religious groups had registered. The March amendments to the law on religious organizations and subsequent Presidential decrees have enabled the Ministry of Justice to facilitate registration of some religious congregations and have 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. The Government's interpretation of the law restricts their freedom to meet and worship in private.

The status of government respect for religious freedom, from a legislative perspective and in practice, improved during the period covered by this report. On March 11, 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, he subsequently promulgated an unpublished implementing regulation stipulating onerous additional requirements for minority congregations to register and operate. The President signed another decree in May that disavowed requirements enumerated in the unpublished regulation and eliminated criminal penalties for members of unregistered

religious groups. In early June, the President also granted amnesty to six members of Jehovah's Witnesses serving prison sentences for conscientious objection to military service.

Although the level of harassment has significantly decreased in the last six months, the types of government harassment experienced by religious groups was consistent with that experienced in years past and included detention, arrest, confiscation of religious literature and materials, pressure to abandon religious beliefs, and threats of eviction and loss of jobs. There were reports of torture, but these claims have not been confirmed. Human rights observers widely reported that the Government replaced a number of Sunni Muslim imams with individuals believed to be less independent in their interpretations of Islam in an attempt to better facilitate government control of mosques.

There is no general, notable societal discrimination or violence based on religion in the country, although the overwhelming majority of citizens identify themselves as "Muslim," and ethnic Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert to other faiths are viewed with skepticism and sometimes ostracized, but the society has historically 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, some observers have speculated that official restrictions on religious freedom, a holdover from the Soviet era, reflect the Government's concern that liberal religious policies could lead to political dissent, particularly the emergence of extreme, political interpretations of Islam throughout the country. The Government appears to view active participation in, or sponsorship of both traditional and nontraditional religions, as a threat to the stability of the Government.

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 representatives and State Department officials raised specific cases of religious freedom abuses in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. The Ambassador, the State Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, and the U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) urged senior Government officials to cease minority religious group harassment, rescind numerical requirements requiring 500 members for registration of groups, decriminalize nonregistered group activity and permit minority groups to register. In addition, the U.S. Ambassador and the U.S. State Department's Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom conveyed formal messages in April and May urging the Government to make a number of improvements with respect to religious freedom. Improving registration for nongovernmental groups, including religious organizations, was a top U.S. priority. Embassy officers met with representatives of unregistered religious groups on a regular basis; these representatives have been more willing to meet publicly with embassy officials after beginning the registration process.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total 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 in 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 of the population. The majority is Sunni Muslim, and the largest minority is Russian Orthodox Christian. The level of religious observance was unknown for both religions.

Ethnic Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs are predominantly Sunni Muslim. There are small pockets of Shi'a Muslims in the country, many of whom are ethnic Iranians living along the border with Iran. There has been a modest, government-sponsored and tightly controlled revival of Islam since independence. During the Soviet era, there were only 4 mosques operating; now there are approximately 350.

While the 1995 census showed that Russians comprised almost 7 percent of the population, subsequent emigration to Russia and elsewhere has reduced this proportion considerably. The majority of ethnic Russians and Armenians are Christian. Practicing Russian Christians are most likely to be 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, who also is a Deputy Chairman of the Government's Council on Religious Affairs, leads the ROC. He

serves under the religious jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Archbishop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. There are five Russian Orthodox priests, but no seminaries.

Russians and Armenians also comprise a significant percentage 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, Pentecostal Christians, the Protestant Word of Life Church, the Greater Grace World Outreach Church, the New Apostolic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and several unaffiliated, nondenominational evangelical Christian groups. In addition, there are small communities of Baha'is, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Hare Krishnas, all of whom the Government recently registered after the adoption of a series of laws this spring that removed obstacles preventing minority groups from registering. A very small community of ethnic Germans, most of who live in and around the city of Serakhs, reportedly practices Lutheranism. The Roman Catholic community in Ashgabat, which includes both citizens and foreigners, meets in the chapel of the Vatican Nunciate. Foreign missionaries, typically representing evangelical Protestant denominations, operate in the country, although the extent of their activities is unknown.

Estimates show fewer than 1,000 ethnic Jews living in the country, virtually all of whom are non-practicing. Most are descendants from families who came to the country from Ukraine during World War II, but there also are some Jewish families living in Turkmenabat, on the border with Uzbekistan, who are members of the community known as Bokharski Jews, referring to the city of Bokhara, Uzbekistan. There are no synagogues or rabbis in the country and the Jewish community continues to dwindle as members emigrate to Israel, Russia, and Germany.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government largely does not protect these rights. In November 2003, the Government implemented a new law on religion to replace the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and its subsequent amendments in 1995 and 1996. Under the old legislation, religious groups had to have 500 citizens of at least 18 years of age in each locality in which it wished to register, in order to obtain legal status. These requirements made it impossible for religious communities other than Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians to register. Even if a group did meet the numerical requirements for a locality, they were not allowed to assemble and were hesitant to sign their names to a document, fearing official harassment.

The November 2003 law, which replaced the 1991 law, required all religious organizations to register, made operations 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, but the remaining laws continue to allow the Government to control religious life and to restrict the activities of all religious groups.

The President signed a decree on January 14 that strengthened the November 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). This doubled the previous rates set in effect by 1996 registration rules. In addition, the Ministry of Justice (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 in the country, 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 because of ill-defined charges.

On March 11, the Government published amendments to the religion law that stipulated reduced numerical thresholds for registration (from 500 to 5), and all minority groups were eligible to register; however, the amendments left gray areas of the law that could be interpreted to prevent registration for groups, although this has not yet happened in practice.

On March 23, an implementing regulation and recommended standard charter were adopted but not published stipulating harsh requirements for religious groups wishing to register. The decree and charter required that religious groups give 20 percent of their donations to the Council on Religious Affairs (CRA), and register

all financial support with the Government. It also required registered religious congregations to make written reports to the CRA on their activities. In addition, registered religious congregations were required to obtain permission from the CRA for individual groups to travel abroad for pilgrimages or conferences. After pressure from the U.S. State Department and the American Embassy, these regulations were publicly disavowed in a decree on May 13.

There are no practical mechanisms in the legal system to protect individuals against violation of religious freedom or persecution by private actors. Governmental entities at all levels, including the courts, have interpreted the laws in such a way as to discriminate against those practicing any faith other than Sunni Islam or Russian Orthodox Christianity. Until June, only Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians could legally hold worship services since they were the only two religions to successfully register with the government. Now, members of four additional religious groups—the Seventh-day Adventists, Baha'is, Baptists and Hare Krishnas—have also registered and are legally allowed to practice their faith.

There is no state religion, but the majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, and Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Turkmen society considers an individual to be born into an ethnicity and religion at the same time. Departures from the pattern are rare and either receive little support or are criticized in society. The Government has incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition as part of its effort to redefine a national identity. For example, the Government supports large, monumental mosques, such as the ones in Ashgabat and Goek Depe, and the one planned for Gipchak. The local population supports village mosques. Despite its embrace of certain aspects of Islamic culture, the Government is concerned about the establishment of foreign-backed Islamic movements in the country.

The Government maintains the CRA, which reports to President Niyazov. The Chairman is the Imam of the Goek Depe Mosque. He serves with three deputy chairmen: the Mufti of Turkmenistan, the head of the ROC in Turkmenistan, and a government representative. The CRA ostensibly acts as an intermediary between the government bureaucracy and registered religious organizations. In practice, it 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 and police forces, and it has no role in promoting interfaith dialogue beyond that between these two religions. Although the Government does not officially favor any one religion, it has provided some financial and other support for the construction of new mosques to the CRA.

The Government maintains tight control over the practice of Islam. It 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 tome, Rukhnama, by teaching it as a religious text and placing it next to the Koran in some mosques. President Niyazov directed that selected phrases from the Rukhnama be inscribed on the large mosque under construction in his home village Of Gipchak. In March the former Chief Mufti of Turkmenistan, Nasrullah Ibn Ibadullah, was sentenced to 22 years in prison for alleged involvement in the November 2002 coup attempt; observers speculate that insufficient support of the Rukhnama may have also merited the arrest.

The Government recognizes only Muslim holidays as national holidays. These include Gurban Bairam (Eid al-Adha), a 3-day holiday that commemorates the end of the Hajj, and Oraza-Bairam (Eid al-Fitr), which commemorates the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. These holidays do not have an overt negative impact on any non-Muslim groups.

Unregistered religious groups are legally forbidden to conduct non-sanctioned religious activities, including gathering, disseminating religious materials, and proselytizing. Government authorities have disrupted meetings of unregistered religious groups, even if the meetings occur in private homes. According to the amended law, participants are subject to fines and administrative (not criminal) arrest under the administrative code. The number of disruptions decreased significantly during the period covered by this report and none have been confirmed since May.

Since the repeal of the unpublished regulation in May, four new religious groups registered by the end of the period covered by this report, including the Seventh-day Adventists in May, and the Baha'is, Baptists and the Hare Krishnas in June. It is unclear whether or not members of Jehovah's Witnesses have applied for registration, although they claim to have applied annually since 2001, but have been rejected. There was no information on a group comprising various Protestant evangelical groups who attempted to register a nondenominational Bible study society in Ashgabat, but were rejected in 2001. Shi'a Muslims were not registered by the

end of the reporting period. It is unclear whether or not they have attempted to apply since the repeal of the unpublished regulation in May. The ROC remains unclear on whether or not it will have to reregister its parishes as required by the November 2003 revised law. Some groups remain either fearful of registering, citing the unpublished decree in late March as reason for skepticism, or refuse to do so on principle.

The Government does not offer alternative service for conscientious objectors. Individuals who refuse to serve in the military for religious reasons are offered noncombatant roles within the military, but are not provided with nonmilitary service alternatives.

There is no official religious instruction in public schools; however, the Government requires in all public schools and institutes of higher learning regular instruction on Rukhnama, President Niyazov's spiritual guidebook on culture and heritage. Beginning in 2002, the Ministry of Education required that each child bring a personal copy of Rukhnama to school.

Article 6 of the November law allows mosques to provide religious education to children after school for four hours a week with the approval of parents, the CRA, and the President. People who have graduated from institutions of higher religious education, (the law does not state if they must be Turkmen or international institutions) and who have obtained CRA approval, may provide religious education. Citizens of the country have a right to receive religious education individually or jointly with other persons based on their own choice; however, providing religious education in private is prohibited, and is subject to liability according to the laws of the country. In practice, no private religious education is permitted and the Government has done nothing to promote religious education.

According to the November law, the ROC is forbidden to conduct religious education programs without CRA and Presidential approval, and there were no reports that either the CRA or the President had 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 Christians. In some cases, the Government actively disparages minority religious groups. A July 2003 issue of state-owned newspaper, "Adalat," published by the Ministry of Justice, published a vitriolic attack against Hare Krishnas and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, describing the groups as foreign and implying they were dangerous.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

On March 11, the Government amended its registration requirements for religious groups and reduced the numerical thresholds for registration from 500 to five. The only groups officially banned by the Government are extremist groups that advocate violence. The activities of unregistered religious groups remain illegal, with violators subject to fines and administrative arrest under the administrative code.

The Government restricts registered and unregistered religious groups from establishing places of worship, and violations of the law constitute an administrative offense. It also forbids religious groups from gathering publicly or privately and punishes individuals or groups who violate these prohibitions. Some congregations continue to practice quietly, largely in private homes.

During the period covered by this report, there were credible but unconfirmed reports that certain congregations of Russian Orthodox Christians were prevented from practicing their faith despite the religion's registration with the Government. Early in the period covered by this report, other minority religious groups were prevented from registering with the Government despite apparently having the required minimum number of congregants.

During the period covered by this report, the Government replaced a number of dynamic imams with younger less qualified individuals to facilitate 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. There were also credible reports that authorities pressured Russian Orthodox priests to teach Rukhnama in their services in Turkmenabat and Ashgabat.

The Government continues to restrict the freedom of parents of some religious groups, such as the Seventh-day Adventists and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, to raise their children in accordance with their religious beliefs.

In practice, foreign missionary activity is prohibited, although both Christian and Muslim missionaries have some presence in the country. Ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups who are accused of disseminating religious material receive harsher treatment than non-ethnic Turkmen, particularly if they have re-

ceived financial support from foreign sources. The Government monitors peaceful minority religious groups in the country, particularly those that are perceived to have connections with or be supported by a supranational hierarchy. In January, President Niyazov warned the newly appointed Mufti of Turkmenistan against accepting money from foreigners seeking to patronize Turkmen mosques to propagate a more fundamentalist Islamic message. The November 2003 Law on Religious Organizations stipulated that religious groups must register any financial or material assistance received from foreign sources. A subsequent amendment in March further required that they also register all assistance received from entities inside Turkmenistan.

Religious literature is no longer published in the country, and in July 2002, the Government prohibited the delivery of all Russian-language newspapers and periodicals into the country, citing high airmail delivery rates. The ban has made it more difficult for religious minority groups, and the ROC, to obtain and import religious literature and materials. The ROC is now barred from subscribing to its Church's main journal, the Journal of the Moscow Patriarch. The decree has also limited the availability of Korans for Muslims. There have been periods in which it was difficult or impossible to find Korans available for purchase.

During the period covered by this report, the Government confiscated copies of Christian literature, including the Bible, claiming that it was not authentic Christian religious literature. As recently as June 10, local authorities raided the home of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and confiscated two Bibles. There were also credible reports that authorities have claimed that Bibles not bearing the Russian Orthodox cross are not legitimate and are therefore subject to confiscation.

The enforced use of President Niyazov's spiritual guide, Rukhnama, in educational institutions, mosques, and Russian Orthodox churches constitutes a restriction of freedom of thought, conscience, and belief. Copies of the book are kept in some mosques, and authorities have pressured religious leaders to place it alongside the Koran and to teach Rukhnama in their services. In November 2003, the Ministry of National Security (MNB) closed down a mosque that failed to place the Rukhnama on the same stand with the Koran for Friday prayer. In addition, according to unconfirmed reports, authorities have forced imams to place the country's flag above mosque entrances, and required sermons to begin with praise of President Niyazov.

In 2003, the Government continued to limit the number of persons allowed to participate in the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj), specifying that only 187 pilgrims out 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 religious pilgrims was facilitated by the re-imposition of an exit visa requirement in March 2003, following the failed assassination attempt on President Niyazov in November 2002. As a result, in August 2003, 48 members of Jehovah's Witnesses were denied exit visas to attend a religious convention in Tajikistan. Five other Witnesses who were able to obtain exit visas were stopped after crossing the border and forced to return.

The Government formally lifted the exit visa requirement in January 2004, theoretically permitting travel to all those who wished to participate in the Hajj or other travel for religious purposes; however, the government maintains a "black list" of targeted individuals, including religious believers, and continues to limit freedom of movement to a lesser degree. For example, on March 9, two women were stopped and prevented from boarding a flight to Kiev to attend a Jehovah's Witnesses conference because their names were included on a "black list" of citizens prohibited from leaving the country. They were told to apply to the Border Directorate in Ashgabat for further explanation. In April, Deutsche Welle Radio reported that five members of Jehovah's Witnesses were removed from a flight from Ashgabat to Moscow because they were on the Government's "black list" of persons forbidden to leave the country.

A religious minority group in Adaban has reported fewer instances of harassment than in the previous reporting period. In May 2003, officers of the MNB and local police raided the group, and one of the members, a teacher, was pressured to sign a letter of resignation, but refused to do so. The teacher had lost her job in 2001 after a similar raid, but was reinstated after teaching a class in the Turkmen language and demonstrating knowledge of the Rukhnama.

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 schools 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. In 2002,

there were reports of a student and a teacher, both members of Jehovah's Witnesses, who were publicly humiliated in front of colleagues and fellow students, and threatened with expulsion and loss of employment. In June 2003, a teacher in Adaban was pressured to resign from her job because of her religious beliefs, but the teacher was subsequently reinstated.

The Government also controls and restricts access to Islamic education. Following President Niyazov's closure of a mosque and madrassa in Dashoguz in 2001, the Theological Faculty at Turkmen State University in Ashgabat became the only academic institution in the country to conduct Islamic education. The Government has since declared further restrictions on Islamic education. In 2002, the President declared a limit of 10 to 20 clerical students a year, who would spend one year at Artogrul Ghazi Mosque in Ashgabat and one year at the Goek Depe Mosque. In April, an Islamic secondary school operating under the auspices of the sole remaining theological faculty was closed, reportedly in part because of school administrators' and teachers' refusal to promote the Rukhnama as an orthodox Islamic text.

The Government restricts the number of Muslim mosques by requiring government permission for construction. Government policy is that every community should have one mosque; however, on March 29, President Niyazov ordered that no more mosques were to be built and stated mosques would henceforth be led by state-appointed imams. The Government supports large, monumental mosques, such as the ones in Ashgabat and Goek Depe, and the one being built in Gipchak. The local population supports village mosques. Villagers who wish to build a mosque must obtain land from local authorities, receive consent from nearby residents, and provide the funding for construction and maintenance.

There are at least two Shi'a Muslim places of worship in the country, one near Ashgabat and one in Turkmenbashi; however, the Government continues to restrict the construction of Shi'a mosques.

There was no progress in the restitution of the Armenian Apostolic church in Turkmenbashi since the March law. Despite recent registration, a Seventh-day Adventist church in Ashgabat, which was bulldozed in 1999, has yet to be rebuilt. Ashgabat's Pentecostal church was seized as well and has yet to be returned.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The systematic harassment of religious minority members, which began April 2003, continued and was extended to the Muslim and Russian Orthodox communities. The Government threatened members of religious minority groups with fines, loss of employment and housing, and imprisonment because of their religious beliefs. Several religious minority groups suspect that the government has infiltrated their gatherings to monitor their activities; nonetheless, some communities continue to function "underground" in a limited capacity. In response to international pressure, four religious groups have been allowed to register since May when most draconian parts of the November 2003 law on religion were removed. The level of harassment has markedly decreased; however, officers from the Sixth Police Department in Ashgabat, the division for fighting organized crime and terrorism, still occasionally question congregation members.

According to unconfirmed reports, prison guards regularly beat five members of the Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned for their refusal to perform compulsory military service. They also reportedly threatened to kill two of the prisoners. According to the reports, prison guards pressured the prisoners to abandon their faith and convert to Islam. President Niyazov granted a general amnesty for conscientious objectors in June, resulting in the release of six members of Jehovah's Witnesses from prison on June 10–12. Two other members of the group, Mansur Masharipov and Vepa Tuvakov, remain in prison, serving 18-month sentences for refusing to do their military service.

On September 30, 2003 a member of Jehovah's Witnesses in Turkmenabat was arrested by a police lieutenant and immediately taken to the Second Police Department where he was badly beaten and kept in custody for 20 hours. He was released the next day and went to a first-aid station for treatment of his injuries. Three police officers later forced him to withdraw his complaint about the beating.

There were no reports of Hare Krishnas being beaten by authorities during the period covered by this report. In May 2003, according to unconfirmed Forum 18 news service reports, authorities reportedly raided a meeting of Hare Krishnas in Ashgabat and beat one member during an interrogation. Authorities reportedly filmed the occupants of the home, confiscated all religious articles and religious literature, and fined the group.

Throughout the period covered by this report prior to the March decree, there were numerous accounts of authorities arbitrarily arresting and interrogating members of several minority religious groups that met to worship, including the Baha'is,

Baptists, Hare Krishnas, members of 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 December 2003, secret police officers raided a Shi'a Muslim mosque in the city of Turkmenbashi in order to break up a commemoration for former Azerbaijani President Aliyev. The group dispersed after authorities threatened them with violence.

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 some instances where local officials continued to harass religious minorities even after March, often because they were not aware of the March Presidential decree. On April 25, according to the Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative, secret police officers, representatives of the city administration for religious affairs, and police officers raided a meeting of Hare Krishnas in a private home in Mary. After the group was questioned for three hours, a secret policeman threatened the Hare Krishnas with fines, dismissal from work, and criminal charges before allowing them to return home.

Two raids on meetings of members of Jehovah's Witnesses occurred in March, one, according to an unconfirmed report from Forum 18 News Service, in a private home in Ashgabat the day after the March 13 Presidential decree pledging adherence to international standards for respect of religious freedom. A similar raid occurred on March 9, and a woman involved was taken to a police station and forced to write an explanatory statement dictated by the police and was sexually harassed by a district police officer.

During the period covered by the last report, authorities raided a number of religious meetings as well. In June 2003, there were reports that authorities raided a Baptist prayer meeting in Turkmenabat, where several members were detained and threatened with imprisonment and fines. In May 2003, officials mistakenly raided the birthday party of a 16-year old girl, believing it was a meeting of a religious minority group. Officials took information on the individuals present, and questioned the parents. Also in May 2003, authorities broke up two unregistered Baptist services in the cities of Balkanabat and Turkmenbashi, and raided at least four different Protestant congregations in the city of Ashgabat. In March 2003, authorities raided a Balkanabat Baptist congregation during worship services and recorded the congregants' names, addresses and places of work. Authorities raided religious minority groups in 2002, in some cases questioned members about activities, and threatened to restrict members from leaving the country. In one case, officials cut off gas, electricity and water supplies to a community, and treated the members harshly, reportedly because of frustration that the ethnic Turkmen members had converted from Islam.

Since 2002, there have been no reports of harassment of Pentecostals.

Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Turkmenabat have continued to meet in private since the Government razed their church building in 1999.

There were some reports of authorities allegedly fabricating false charges in order to punish individuals for their religious beliefs. In March, authorities entered the home of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and demanded he immediately pay a fine from 2001 that allegedly remained unpaid. Though 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, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses was convicted of fraud and sentenced to 4 years in prison in 2001. The Jehovah's Witness community claimed that the accusations of fraud were based on fabricated evidence. Ms. Dzhumanazarova was released on September 30, 2003, after having served half of her prison sentence, but is suffering from bronchial and kidney problems due to harsh prison conditions. Though released, she remains under surveillance by the security agencies.

According to estimates, there was one long-term religious detainee in the country during the reporting period; however, a number of individuals were detained and harassed by officials for short periods of time, often because they were caught illegally worshiping or had outstanding fines. For example, in November 2003, police reportedly raided a Baptist service and brought everyone present, including children, to a police station. Congregants were accused of worshipping without state registration, and were threatened with fines and criminal charges for any additional violations. Authorities reportedly threatened to place one woman's children in a children's home. In July 2003, officers from the Ministry of National Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs detained a Baha'i believer in her village near the southern city of Mary. The officials photographed and fingerprinted her, and detained her for

over twelve hours, questioning her about the Baha'i faith, local believers, and her activities in the community. Officials also detained a Baha'i believer in Turkmenbashi City along with his wife and another woman for several hours in August 2003, asking for a list of the Baha'i believers in the area as well as for information about when and where Baha'is gather to worship.

In December 2003, Geldy Khudaikuliev, the leader of a Baptist congregation in Geok Depe, was detained without charge for six days after traveling to Ashgabat on business. His family was later told that Khudaikuliev was being held at the headquarters of the National Security Ministry in Ashgabat, although they were not allowed access to him. Khudaikuliev was released on December 20 as a result of international pressure for his release.

Ten members of Jehovah's Witnesses served prison sentences. Eight were held for refusing to perform compulsory military service, one was incarcerated for alleged fraud charges, and another served an eight-year sentence on questionable assault charges. One prisoner, Oguldzhan Dzhumanazarova, was released on September 30, 2003 after serving half of her prison sentence. Another, Nikolai Shelekhov, was released on January 2 after completing his second prison sentence for conscientious objection to military service. Six prisoners were granted amnesty by a Presidential decree and released in June. Two prisoners, Mansur Masharipov and Vepa Tuvakov remain incarcerated for refusing to serve in the military.

Despite the President's announcement that all imprisoned conscientious objectors should be released, Mansur Masharipov and Vepa Tuvakov were sentenced respectively on May 28 and June 3 to 18 months in prison because of their conscientious objection to military service. They are both members of Jehovah's Witnesses. They were invited for an interview by the authorities but were immediately taken into custody and put into pretrial detention. After the trials, they were transferred to the Seydi penal colony.

On March 2, Turkmenistan's popular and respected former Chief Mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, was secretly tried and sentenced to 22 years in prison, reportedly in connection with his alleged role in a failed November 2002 coup plot. Ibadullah was dismissed as Chief Mufti in January 2003, reportedly in part for his refusal to teach the President's tome, 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 his release.

Nikolai Shelekhov, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, was released in January from a labor camp in Turkmenabat after serving a second full sentence, for refusing military service on grounds of conscience. Shelekhov's second conviction came only six months after his release from the prison colony at which he served one year for the same offense.

Religious leader Hoja Ahmed Orazglychev, remained isolated in internal exile in Tedjen, for alleged criminal activity. Some believe his refusal to publicly support the Niyazov regime and his strict religious beliefs also contributed to his exile. No update was available at the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Government imposed a number of financial penalties on religious groups attempting to meet for worship, though there have been no reports of fines imposed since April. An unconfirmed Forum 18 report indicates that one member of Jehovah's Witnesses was fined a large sum in April. On April 12, the Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative reported that police raided a Baptist meeting in a private Ashgabat apartment, and confiscated the belongings of one family, while threatening to do the same to other members. Many members attending the meeting were fined five times the minimum monthly wage.

On January 26, authorities entered the apartment of a family who attended a Baptist church in Turkmenbashi. The authorities confiscated a carpet and a clock in lieu of an unpaid fine that the wife had refused to pay. The husband's fine already had been deducted from his wages. The fines were imposed after authorities raided the Turkmenbashi Baptist church in May 2003.

The Baptist Church in Balkanabat reported that in July and August 2003, all of its members were fined $11 (250,000 manat) and that the rate doubled to $22 (500,000 manat) in October. In August 2003, police banned members of the Baptist Church in Balkanabat from meeting for services and threatened to issue fines for each meeting that occurred.

According to an unconfirmed Forum 18 news service report, in July 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 $58 fine (250,000 manat). The officials admitted to stealing $1 (4,000 manat) from the woman and did not return it. Forum 18 also reported that another deaf

and mute Baptist woman was summoned to court in July 2003. She was also threatened with fifteen days imprisonment if she failed to pay her fine.

Individuals were also fined excessive amounts in June 2003, when authorities raided a Baptist prayer meeting in Turkmenabat. In April 2003, police raided the meeting of an unregistered Christian group, confiscated the group's Bibles, and fined the group's leaders $12.50 (250,000 manat). Two courts affirmed the actions. A similar case occurred in March 2003.

Individuals of minority religious groups were pressured by authorities to renounce their faith during the period covered by this report. Multiple sources report that prison guards in a labor camp in the town of Seydi beat and pressured the prisoners, who were members of Jehovah's Witnesses, to abandon their faith and convert to Islam.

On March 11, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ashgabat was pressured by the Council on Religious Affairs to renounce his faith and 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 department responsible for the fight against organized crime and terrorism. Males were beaten, all were required to renounce their faith in writing, and passports were confiscated until fines were paid.

According to an unconfirmed report from Forum 18 News Service in May, a Hindu was forced by police officers to sign a statement renouncing his beliefs after being threatened with physical violence and criminal punishment.

There were no confirmed cases in which the Government carried out or permitted the forced mass resettlement of persons based on their religious beliefs or practices; however, authorities threatened individual members of several religious minority groups with resettlement unless they immediately ceased holding or attending meetings of their respective groups. For example, the home of former chief Mufti Ibadulla ibn Nasrullah was confiscated and assigned to a family whose house was demolished because of government construction projects.

In June 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. In May 2003, officers of the MNB and local police raided a meeting of five members of the same group in Abadan.

There were also reports that individuals of religious minorities were singled out for abuse for refusing to register for military service. The five members of the Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned in a labor camp in the town of Seydi were beaten repeatedly because of their religious beliefs and pressured to convert to Islam. Authorities also reportedly threatened to kill two of the prisoners. In April, the Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative reported that three unnamed Baptists had gone into hiding to avoid arrest for refusing military conscription on religious grounds. The men were not offered any nonmilitary service to perform as an alternative.

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 forReligious Freedom

Since March, four religious minorities gained registration by the end of the reporting period. They include the Seventh-day Adventists, the Baha'is, the Baptists, and the Hare Krishnas. In response to strong international pressure, several legislative changes were implemented to relax laws hindering religious activities. In March, two presidential decrees were issued and amendments to the November 2003 law adopted. Changes included reducing the black list of individuals prohibited from leaving the country, pledging to register all religious groups and pledging to adhere to generally accepted international norms and rules concerning treatment of religious minorities. Though all religious groups are still required to register with the Government, the numerical threshold for each group was reduced from 500 to 5. Similarly, criminal penalties for activities of unregistered congregations were formally eliminated in May, and unpublished regulation that imposed additional registration requirements for minority congregations was publicly invalidated.

All minority religious groups in contact with the U.S. Embassy at the end of the reporting period reported that harassment has dramatically lessened since the March law was passed, and that conditions were much better than in 2003. The

Ministry of Justice has started to display a much more helpful and positive attitude, by reaching out to unregistered groups to encourage applications and to offer assistance with the registration process. One minority religious leader commented that the attitude of the CRA has swung from indifference to relative support for registration. Several religions are pursuing registration and are working with the Government to complete the process.

In response to international pressure, President Niyazov granted a general amnesty for conscientious objectors in June. Six members of Jehovah's Witnesses—Rinat Babadzhanov, Aleksandr Matveyev, Shohrat Mitogorov, Ruslan Nasyrov, Rozymamed Satlykov and Kurban Zakirov—were released from prison on June 10–12; however, it is still unclear as to whether or not charges have been officially dropped. Two other members of the group, Mansur Masharipov and Vepa Tuvakov, remain in prison, serving 18-month sentences for refusing to perform their military service.

Nikolai Shelekhov, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, was released in January from a labor camp in Turkmenabat after serving a second full sentence for refusing military service on the grounds of conscientious objection. Shelekhov's second conviction came only six months after his release from the prison colony at which he served one year for the same offense.

Geldy Khudaikuliev, the leader of a Baptist congregation in Geok Depe was released on December 20, 2003, as a result of international pressure. Khudaikuliev was detained without charge for six days after traveling to Ashgabat on business. His family was later told that Khudaikuliev was being held at the headquarters of the National Security Ministry in Ashgabat, although they were not allowed access to him.

Oguldzhan Dzhumanazarova, sentenced in 2001 to four years in prison for fraud after helping fellow believers with their legal problems in her capacity as a public attorney, was released in September 2003. Dzhumanazarova denies the charges.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There were no reports of general, overt societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the period covered by this report.

Restrictive government control, unorthodox indigenous Islamic culture, and 70 years of Soviet rule have meant that traditional mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in society. Traditional Turkmen 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 Turkmen Muslims' expression of Islam than regular prayer at mosques.

Although more traditional adherents of Islam consider Turkmen interpretations unorthodox and many Turkmen do not regularly attend mosques, the overwhelming majority of Turkmen identify themselves as "Muslim" and Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert from Islam to other faiths are viewed skeptically and sometimes ostracized, and ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups accused of disseminating religious material received harsher treatment than members of other ethnic groups, particularly if they received financial support from foreign sources.

Despite this, Turkmen society has historically been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs. For example, in the early part of the 20th century, Ashgabat was a refuge for members of the Baha'i faith escaping persecution in Iran, and the first Baha'i temple was built in Ashgabat. Government repression of minority religions does not reflect doctrinal or societal friction between the majority Muslim population and minority religions. Rather, observers believe that it 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.

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 State Department officials raised specific cases of religious freedom abuses in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. In November 2003, the Embassy conveyed to the Government a formal demarche outlining specific steps that had to be taken in order for Turkmenistan to avoid designation as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act. In March, when limited progress was noted the U.S. Ambassador and the

U.S. State Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs conveyed a similar message to government officials, including the President and Foreign Minister. The American Embassy and the U.S. State Department's Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom conveyed formal messages in April and May urging the Government to make a number of improvements, including: to drop criminal penalties for activity by unregistered groups, to invalidate the secret decree imposing additional registration requirements for minority congregations, to register minority congregations, and to immediately cease their harassment. U.S. Embassy representatives continued to encourage the Government to communicate the March Presidential decree to local authorities.

The Ambassador and Embassy officers raised specific reports of abuse and urged greater respect for religious freedom in meetings with the Foreign Ministry. The Ambassador and visiting OSCE Ambassador Minikes also urged greater respect for religious freedom with the CRA. In multiple meetings with the Foreign Minister, the Ambassador also raised specific reports of abuses and urged the Government to end the policy of requiring numerically based registration for religious minority groups and to eliminate the criminal penalties for unregistered groups.

The Ambassador held an Iftar dinner in November 2003 to promote religious tolerance; members of the CRA, including the Mufti, attended.

The Ambassador and Embassy officers met regularly with the staff of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat and other diplomatic missions in order to maximize cooperation in monitoring abuses of and promoting greater respect for religious freedom. Together with the international community, the Embassy conveyed to Government officials the content of U.S. cosponsored resolutions on the country from the United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which noted the serious abuses of religious freedom and urged immediate action.

Embassy officers regularly met with representatives of registered and unregistered religious groups to monitor their situation, 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.

UKRAINE

The 1996 Constitution and the 1991 law on Freedom of Conscience provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects these rights 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. Registration and property restitution problems remained; however, the Government continued to facilitate the return of some properties.The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were some exceptions, particularly 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 a total area of 233,088 square miles, and its population is 47.3 million. Estimates of those who consider themselves believers have varied widely. A nationwide survey conducted in October 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 did not believe in God. As of January 1, there were 29,785 religious organizations, including 28,614 religious communities. Religious practice is strongest in the western part of the country. More than 90 percent of religiously active citizens are Christian, with the majority being Orthodox. The poll conducted by the Razumkov Center in April shows that most citizens identify themselves as Orthodox Christians of one of three Orthodox Churches. Of the respondents, 10.7 percent belonged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)-Moscow Patriarchate, 14.8 percent to the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate, 1.0 percent to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Of respondents, 6.4 percent said they

were members of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, sometimes known as the Uniate, Byzantine, or Eastern Rite Church. Roman Catholics claim approximately 1 million adherents, or approximately 2 percent of the total population. However, according to the April Razumkov Center survey, Roman Catholics comprised 0.8 percent of respondents, while Protestant Christian comprised 0.9 percent, other religious denominations 2.1 percent, and undecided 1.8 percent. There are small but significant populations of Jews and Muslims, as well as growing communities of Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Evangelical Christians, adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)-Moscow Patriarchate has 10,628 registered organizations, most of which are located in the central, southern, and eastern parts of the country. The Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) of Kiev heads the Church within the country. The UOC-Kiev Patriarchate 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-Kiev Patriarchate has 3,508 registered organizations, approximately 60 percent of which are in the western part of the country. 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. It was legalized in 1989 and has 1,190 registered organizations, most of them in the western part of the country. 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 headed in Ukraine by Metropolitan Mefodiy of Ternopil and Podil.

The adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church 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. Legalized in 1989, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church had 3,480 registered organizations communities as of January 1. Its members constituted a majority of the believers in the west, and approximately 10 percent of the population as a whole, or approximately 4.5 to 5 million persons.

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 1,000 registered organizations serving approximately 2 percent of the population, or 1.2 million persons. The Jewish community has a long history in the country. Estimates vary about the size of the current Jewish population. According to the State Committee of Statistics, the Jewish population during the 2001 census was estimated at 103,600, although some foreign observers estimate it at 300,000. 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 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 identify themselves openly as Jewish. Most observant Jews are Orthodox. The Progressive (Reform) Jewish movement has 37 communities.

Sheik Tamim Akhmed Mohammed Mutach, head of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Ukraine and representative on the All-Ukrainian Council estimated that there are 2 million Muslims, although other estimates are substantially lower. There are 467 registered Muslim communities. According to Sheik Tamim, 50,000 Muslims, mostly foreign, live in Kiev. Many of the country's Muslims are Crimean Tatars. The Crimean Tatars were deported forcibly from Crimea in 1944, but they began returning in 1989. There are approximately 300,000 Crimean Tatars in Ukraine; 267,000 live in the peninsula. Protestant Churches have grown in the years since independence. According to the State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA), 28.7 percent of all religious organizations in the country are Protestant. Evangelical Baptists are perhaps the largest group, claiming over 140,000 members in approximately 2,788 organizations. Other growing communities include Anglicans, Calvinists, Evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, Mormons, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, and others. There are also new communities of Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and others.

The SCRA estimates that here are more than 15 nontraditional religious movements in the country. As of January 1, 45 Krishna Consciousness communities, 48 Buddhist communities, and 13 Baha'i communities were registered.

According to the SCRA, as of January 1 there were 163 theological educational institutions with 9,458 full-time and 9,992 correspondence students. Foreign religious workers are active in many faiths and denominations. The SCRA estimates that 56 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 2003, 11,947 foreign religious workers were admitted to the country, including 6,283 U.S. citizens.

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 these rights in practice; 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 Day, Easter Monday, and Holy Trinity Day, all according to the Julian Calendar shared by Orthodox and Greek Catholics. The law virtually requires all religious organizations to register with the State. The SCRA is responsible for liaison with religious organizations and for the execution of state policy on religion. The SCRA's headquarters are in Kiev; it maintains representatives in all regional centers, as well as in the autonomous cities of Kiev and Sevastopol. Each religious organization with more than 10 adult members must register its articles and statutes either as a local or national organization to obtain the status of a "juridical entity," necessary to conduct many economic activities including publishing, banking, and property transactions. Registration is also necessary to be considered for restitution of religious property. National organizations must register with the SCRA, and then each local affiliate must register with the local office of the SCRA in the region where it is located. By law the registration process should take 1 month, or 3 months if the SCRA requests an expert opinion on the legitimacy of a group applying for registration. In practice according to the SCRA, the average registration period is 3 months, and registration may take 6 months for cases in which the SCRA requires additional expert evaluation. The Progressive Jewish Community reported that its application for registration in Kharkiv took a year before being approved. Denial of registration may be appealed in court. In addition to registering religious organizations, local offices of the SCRA supervise compliance with the provisions of the law. The SCRA often consults 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.

There is no state religion; however, the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church 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-Moscow Patriarchate in many areas of the country, and supporting the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the western part of the country. Each of the major religions and many of the smaller ones maintain a presence in all parts of the country. The central Government has spoken in favor of unity of the country's Orthodox Churches; it has tried to treat all Orthodox Churches equally.

Officially, religion must be kept out of the public school curriculum; however, the Government has attempted to introduce training in "basic Christian ethics" into schools. While Jewish leaders supported the teaching of ethics and civics in school, they insisted on a nonsectarian approach to this training. In late 2002 and early 2003, a working group was formed in the All-Ukrainian Council to discuss the issue; however, a resolution has yet to be reached. Schools run by religious communities may, and do, include religious education as an extracurricular activity.

On June 7, President Kuchma signed into law the amendments to the Law on Alternative (Non-Military) Service, adopted by the Supreme Rada in May. The amended bill stipulates that the term of alternative service shall be 1.5 times the duration of active military duty. Orthodox symbols and ceremonies are routinely used in the armed forces as well. According to the law, religious organizations maintain a privileged status as the only organizations permitted to seek restitution of property confiscated by the Soviet regime. During the period covered by this report, mostly

buildings and objects immediately necessary for religious worship were subject to restitution. Communities must apply to regional authorities. While the consideration of a claim should be completed within a month, it frequently takes much longer.

According to the SCRA, as of January 1, religious organizations in Ukraine were using 19,975 religious buildings. There were 863 religious buildings and premises, including 53 architectural heritage sites, transferred into ownership and or use to religious organizations in 2003. Religious organizations rent 29.4 percent of those buildings. As of January 1, 2,435 religious buildings were under construction. In 2003 the government allocated more than $661,000 (3.5 million hryvnyas) for inventory and reconstruction of sacred buildings, including the Assumption Cathedral in Volodymyr Volynsky, Volyn' Oblast, Cathedral of the Protection of the Mother of God in Izmail, Odesa Oblast, Annunciation Cathedral in Nizhyn, the Transfiguration Cathedral in Novhord-Siverskiy, Chernihiv Oblast, and a monastery in Manyava, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast. Intracommunal competition for particular properties complicates the restitution issue for both Christian and Jewish 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.

Upon the instruction of the Cabinet of Ministers, a working group continues to operate in Kiev to settle issues pertaining to the use of premises and territory of the 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's, St. Florus and Laurus, and St. Panteleymon's monasteries of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. The commission has formed a working group to address the issues pertaining to further use and preservation of sacred buildings of the Pochayiv Lavra monastery in the Ternopil Oblast. According to the SCRA, the Government is also seeking to transfer of the following church buildings: St. Cyril Church in Kiev, Church of the Seven Holy Martyrs in Symferopol, and former monastery premises in Starokostyantyniv, Khmelnytsky Oblast to the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate; the Dominican Cathedral and a former church building in Lviv, St. Nicolas Cathedral in Kiev, Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary in Ivano-Frankivsk, and premises at Bunin Street in Odesa to the Roman Catholic Church; religious building in Balta, Odesa Oblast to the Russian Old Rite Orthodox Church; and a building at Khmelnytsky Street in Kiev to the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists.

The Government has instructed the State Property Fund and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to assist the Ukraine-U.S. Foundation in finding new premises in order to resolve a dispute between the Foundation and the Monastery of the Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple (UOC-Moscow Patriarchate) over the use of the former monastery premises.

In May the Supreme Rada rejected the Amendments to the Land Code, which would have provided for the permanent use of land by religious organizations, drafted with participation of the SCRA in 2003. The SCRA also participated in the drafting of the law on pension coverage for clergy, sextons, and individuals who held elective posts in religious organizations prior to the adoption of the Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations. This draft is still under Supreme Rada examination.

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 noncitizen 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 SCRA. They 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."

Representatives of the Muslim community noted that they have been unable to register a community in Kharkiv for the past 11 years. Muslims often are subject to document checks by local police, particularly in Kharkiv and Poltava. They have raised this issue with the Presidential Administration and the SCRA. Islamic community leaders expressed frustration with the Ministry of Education, which has yet to register a single Islamic school. These leaders suggested they are continuing to work with the SCRA to register their primary and secondary schools.

Although evangelical groups have expressed concerns in the past about possible government discrimination against individual believers of nonnative religions, evangelical leaders indicated that their members had reported no such discrimination during the period covered by this report.

Representatives of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church cited difficulties in providing religious services to soldiers and objected to the need to obtain approval for prison ministry activities from prison chaplains of the Moscow Patriarchate. There was no alteration in these procedures during the period covered by this report.

There continue to be charges that religious land is being used inappropriately. Local officials in the western district of Volodymyr-Volynskyy continued to allow construction of an apartment building on the site of an old Jewish cemetery despite a 2002 court ruling to halt construction and a letter from the Ministry of Culture and Arts asking for a halt in construction until the court case is resolved. Local authorities have refused to implement the relevant court decisions. Despite requests from the Roman Catholic Church, the Government has not transferred its ownership of St. Nicholas's Cathedral and a former residence of Roman Catholic bishops in Kiev to the Church. The Church uses the cathedral on weekends and major religious holidays. Local authorities in Kremenchuk, Poltava Oblast, have not yet fulfilled their pledge to provide land for church construction to the local Roman Catholic community.

At times local governments in regions that are traditionally dominated by one or another religious group discriminate against their rivals in restituting property and granting registration. Representatives of the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate, the UAOC, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church alleged local governments preference for the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate in the east. UOC-Moscow Patriarchate representatives claim that their worshipers in Lviv and other Western Ukrainian cities experience intense pressure. Despite their continued efforts to acquire land for the construction of a new cathedral in Lviv, UOC-Moscow representatives say that the local administration has been obstinate and slow to action, repeatedly balked on promises, and obstructed the process. UOC-Moscow Patriarchate representatives attribute such discrimination to the marked predominance of Greek Catholics in the region, especially those in the upper echelons of local government. UOC-Kiev Patriarchate representatives cited local authorities' failure to return cathedrals' church buildings in Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Zhytomyr and complained that some local governments in regions traditionally dominated by the Moscow Patriarchate, including Odesa, Poltava, and Rivne and Volyn oblasts, deliberately delayed registration of congregations that had left the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate for the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate. Roman Catholic representatives expressed frustration at unrealized restitution claims in Sevastopol, Bila Tserkva, Uman, Zhytomyr, and Kiev. During the period covered by this report, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad complained of pressure from the Moscow Patriarchate to surrender church buildings to the Moscow Patriarchate in Malyn, Zhytomyr Oblast, and in the Odesa Oblast.

The Government continued to return properties expropriated during the Soviet era to religious groups; however, not all groups regarded the pace of restitution as satisfactory, and all major religious communities continued to have outstanding restitution claims. Many properties for which restitution is sought are occupied, often by state institutions, or are historical landmarks. 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 and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 11, President Kuchma signed into law the bill on Approving the State Program of Preservation and Use of Cultural Heritage Sites for 2004–2010, after the Parliament (Rada) adopted the law in April. The program envisages further improvement of the legislation regulating protection and use of cultural heritage sites; measures to enhance protection of cultural heritage sites, including inventory of all such places, examination of historical cemeteries, burial and memorial sites, and measures to preserve them; and further implementation of the country's international commitments pertaining to protection of cultural heritage sites. Government officials worked with members of Jehovah's Witnesses to facilitate the preparations for the Church's World Congress held in Kiev, Kharkiv, Simferopol, and Lviv in August 2003. 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, Cherkasy Oblast. The Government returned a synagogue in Kharkiv, which in April was transferred to representatives of Progressive Jewish religious communities of the Kharkiv Region. On February 5, the Zhytomyr Oblast Archive returned 17 Torah scrolls to the local Jewish community. In May the Government returned the former residence of Catholic Bishop in Lviv for use to the Roman Catholic Church.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were strains, particularly among the leadership of contending religious organizations.

The debate regarding possible unification of some or all of the three Orthodox Churches and granting them canonical status as an autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church lost momentum in 2001. Leaders of the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate and the UAOC began negotiations on unification in the hope that, when unified, they would be recognized as the country's Orthodox Church by Orthodoxy's "First Among Equals," Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

Tensions remain between some adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate over control of property in the western part of the country, which is a legacy of the forcible reunification of these two churches under the Soviet regime. The UOC-Moscow Patriarchate also accused the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of attempting to expand in regions where traditionally the Moscow Patriarchate is strong. The UOC-Moscow Patriarchate opposed plans of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to establish a Greek-Catholic Patriarchate in Ukraine. Disputes between the Kiev and Moscow Patriarchates also continued.

In Poltava an ongoing dispute began in May 2002 when a priest, churchwarden, and several other parishioners of St. Nicholas' Church left the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate and joined the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate. The parishioners loyal to the Kiev Patriarchate filed a lawsuit against what they described as an illegal seizure of the church building by the Moscow Patriarchate. In April a local court ruled that the church belongs to the Kiev Patriarchate.

Representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate in Rivne seek the return of the Holy Resurrection Cathedral and a former eparchial chancery. At present both premises are used by the Kiev Patriarchate.

Crimean Tatar representatives claim significant societal discrimination against their people, but not necessarily for religious reasons. In Kharkiv Muslim university students primarily of Arab and African origins reported instances of discriminatory documentation inspection and slander perpetrated by the local police force and other citizens. Crimean Tatars demand the removal of the central market from the territory of an old Muslim cemetery in the Crimean town of Bakhchisaray.

A Pentecostal religious organization alleged the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate ordered the reprinting of criticism of Pentecostals, originally published in Russia, in a Crimean newspaper. The same organization alleged that the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate sought to intervene with government officials in an attempt to derail the construction of religious buildings.

Acts of anti-Semitism continued but were infrequent. There were no reports of anyone having been apprehended following the June 2002 vandalism of a Holocaust memorial in Zhytomyr. One Jewish community leader stated that this and earlier attacks were not indicative of an overall anti-Semitic societal attitude; he did not see a rise in anti-Semitic acts from prior years.

In April Jewish community activists discovered that vandals were removing gold from the mass graves of Jews killed by Nazis at the Sosonky memorial in Rivne. The local police are investigating the case. On May 23 vandals destroyed several dozen tombstones, at Jewish and Christian burial sites, at the Kurenivske Cemetery in Kiev. Police are investigating the incident.

Anti-Semitic articles appear frequently in small publications and irregular newsletters, although such articles rarely appear in the national press. The monthly journal "Personnel," whose editorial board includes several parliamentary deputies, generally published one anti-Semitic article each month. The Jewish community received support from public officials in criticizing articles in the journal. On April 20, the State Committee for Nationalities and Migration filed a lawsuit with the Kiev Economic Court to stop publication of "Personnel" journal and "Personnel-Plus" newspaper for violation of the Law on Information and the Law on the Print Mass Media. On March 12, the State Committee for Nationalities and Migration filed a lawsuit against "Idealist" newspaper for publication of anti-Semitic articles. On January 28, the Shevchenkivsky Local Court in Kiev ruled that publication of the newspaper "Silski Visti" be suspended for fomenting interethnic hatred in connection with "Silski Visti" publishing on November 15, 2002, professor Vasyl Yaremenko's article "Myth about Ukrainian Anti-Semitism", and on September 30, 2003, another article by professor Yaremenko "Jews in Ukraine: Reality without Myths." The paper is appealing the ruling. "Silski Visti" views the court decision as an attempt to close the major opposition newspaper (circulation 515,000) prior to the October 2004 presidential elections.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTION

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 has intervened 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 events in the country's religious life. During November 2003 in Lviv, the Ambassador and Embassy officers met with various denominations in an effort to better understand inter-confessional relationships in the West. During June in Zhytomyr and throughout the period covered by this report in Kiev, Embassy officers observed religious freedom court cases involving different denominations. In October 2003 in Dnipropetrovsk, an Embassy officer participated in the cornerstone-laying ceremony for Ukraine's first Holocaust museum. In Uman an Embassy officer attended the annual pilgrimage of Breslover Hasidic Jews to the burial site of their sect's founder in September 2003. Embassy officers encouraged the Government of Ukraine to send a high-level delegation to the Conference on Anti-Semitism in Berlin. Embassy officers met with Muslim leaders in Kiev, Odesa, and Crimea throughout the period covered by this report in an effort to understand the concerns of those communities. An Embassy officer also met with Crimean Karaim religious leaders in order to learn more about issues import to them. The Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner in Kiev.

During the period covered by this report, Embassy officers maintained 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, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which are active in the country. In addition the Embassy facilitated similar meetings with such groups for U.S. Members of Congress and other visiting U.S. officials.

The Embassy closely monitored the Sambir and Volodymyr-Volynskyy cemetery cases, raising them with the State Committee on Religious Affairs. Embassy officers visited the cemetery in Volodymyr-Volynskyy and met with local officials to discuss the case. The Embassy also raised the Volodymyr-Volynskyy cemetery case with the Volyn State Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Prime Minister's office, and the Presidential Administration. In addition the Embassy has raised these cemetery cases as well as the general restitution situation with government officials. The Embassy sent four secondary schoolteachers to two summer institutes run by the Holocaust museum in Washington, D.C. The Embassy co-sponsored an all-day seminar on reporting in a multiethnic society that used the documentary film on the life of the eminent Ukrainian Jewish lawyer Arnold Margolin as a launching point for the discussion. A significant portion of the discussion focused on issues of religious differences, as well as ethnic minorities in the country. The seminar featured journalists, government officials, and representatives

of NGOs. The Fulbright program in Ukraine conducted a seminar on "Exporting Religion, Translating Beliefs: American Religions in Europe," which featured discussions on the way in which the U.S. religious movements have (and have not) influenced European religious trends. During the period of this report, the Eurasian Exchanges and Training Grant competition focused on the issue of building tolerance in the country, including religious, ethnic, and linguistic tolerance. The Embassy presented three International Visitors Program proposals focusing on Islam, Crimean Tatars, and the promotion of interethnic harmony. Embassy officers met with students of the International Summer School of Religious Tolerance at the Religious Studies Department of the Philosophy Institute, National Academy of Sciences.

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. The Church of England and the Church of Scotland are established 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. Centuries-old sectarian divisions and instances of violence persist 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 country has a total area of 94,525 square miles, and its population in mid-2002 was approximately 59.2 million. The April 2001 census contained a voluntary question on religion; the results were released in February 2003. The topic of religion was new to the official statistics for England, Wales, and Scotland, although the subject had been included in previous census data for Northern Ireland. Although their methodologies differ greatly, the numbers collected by individual religious communities highlight patterns of adherence and belief.

The 2001 census 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). Over 9 million (15.5 percent) of those responding stated they have no religion. The census's religion question was voluntary, and only 7.3 percent chose not to respond.

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 Anglican churches, 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 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, particularly in 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 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 2002–03 (published in March), 18 cases were prosecuted under this law between December 2001 (when the law took effect) and the end of March 2003. Of these cases, eight resulted in a conviction on a religiously aggravated charge, two in conviction on a nonaggravated charge, one was advised before charges were brought that there was insufficient evidence to proceed, and seven were acquitted or prosecution was otherwise discontinued.

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 unless both the Church and the public favor such a move, and 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 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 church buildings, such as cathedrals, but such funding is not restricted to Church of England buildings. A government grants program 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 June, there were approximately 7,000 state-funded schools with a religious character in England. All but 42 of these schools are 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 May a House of Commons select committee investigating the causes of race riots in the North of England in 2001 recommended that the government refuse to license any new faith schools unless the school could show a commitment to multiculturalism and proposed the schools should do more to attract a diverse student body.

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 country. According to the Education Reform Act of 1988, it forms part of the core curriculum for students in England and Wales (the requirements for Scotland were outlined in the Education Act of 1980.) The shape and content of religious instruction is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed syllabuses are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity while taking account of the teachings and practices of other principal religions in the country. Syllabuses must be non-denominational and refrain from attempting to convert pupils.

In addition, schools 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.

The Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion by public authorities. In Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment Act specifically bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. 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 June 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 December 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. In June the Department of Health issued new guidance for chaplaincy services in National Health Service hospitals that included interfaith support as a key role for chaplains.

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 June 2003, the Home Office opened its Faith Communities Unit, which is charged with promoting interfaith contact and improving government exchange with religious communities. The Faith Communities Unit is also undertaking a project of "faith literacy" to improve government employees' understanding of different religious communities. In March 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 government consultations include relevant input from faith communities when forming policy, to assess the extent to which faith communities benefit from government funding programs and how 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 Home Office's Faith Communities Unit will lead on following the report's recommendations, and a Home Office Steering Group will evaluate the effect of its recommendations in 2005.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Due to the limited broadcast spectrum, the 1990 Broadcasting Act precludes certain groups, including those "wholly or mainly of a religious nature," from obtaining the few available national licenses. Religious groups are not restricted from owning a range of local and regional broadcast licenses—including licenses for local digital radio, local and regional analog radio, cable, and satellite channels—whose frequencies are more numerous and, therefore, not subject to provisions regarding broad audience appeal.

According to a 1999 decision of the Charity Commission, 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 immigration relations. 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. In order 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 against this refusal on human rights grounds. An Immigration Adjudicator dismissed this appeal in April.

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 enforced and essentially a legal anachronism, blasphemy against Anglican doctrine remains technically illegal. Several religious organizations, in association with the Commission for Racial Equality, are attempting to abolish the law or broaden its protection to include all faiths. In June 2003, the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offenses published a report on its deliberations on a possible repeal of the Law on Blasphemy. The report, while failing to reach a clear conclusion, recommended that Parliament should consider arguments for leaving the blasphemy law as it stands, even though its use might become increasingly uncommon, but also seek ways of expressing in law the need for protection of all faiths. 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.

In May the Home Office published the results of a 2001 survey of attitudes toward religion in England and Wales. In response to a question about perceptions of whether there was sufficient protection against religious discrimination, the majority of respondents said the Government was doing about the right amount to protect the rights of persons belonging to different religions. More respondents affiliated to Hindu (70 percent), Sikh (62 percent), and Muslim (62 percent) faiths gave favorable responses than those with Christian affiliation (53 percent). A sizeable minority of respondents indicated the Government was doing too little to protect religious rights. This perception was most prevalent among Muslims (34 percent) and Sikhs (34 percent).

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is not required to conform to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act of 1998, which provides that "a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity." In relation to their percentage of the Northern Ireland population (44 percent), Catholics are underrepresented in the PSNI. The Police (Northern Ireland) Act of 2000, which incorporates many of the recommendations of the 1999 Patten Commission Report, mandates measures designed to expand Catholic representation in the PSNI. Measures to increase Catholic representation in the PSNI include the establishment of an independent recruit-

ment agency and a recruitment policy mandating equal intake of qualified Catholics and non-Catholics. A 50/50 recruitment policy has been implemented, and by the end of the period covered by this report, the proportion of Catholics represented in the PSNI had risen to 15 percent.

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 persist between the Protestant and Catholic communities, political and cultural differences contributed to problems between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland.

In 1998 the majority of citizens (72 percent) in Northern Ireland voted to support the Good Friday Agreement, which aims to create a lasting settlement to the conflict in Northern Ireland and a society based on equality of opportunity and human rights.

The police in Northern Ireland reported approximately 157 attacks against both Catholic and Protestant churches, schools, and meeting halls in 2003. Such sectarian violence often coincides with heightened tensions during the spring and summer marching season. However, the 2003 marching season was the least contentious in many years, with no major incidents of interface violence. Negotiations involving members of "Loyal Institutions" (the Royal Black Preceptory, Orange Order, and Apprentice Boys, whose membership almost exclusively is Protestant), local leaders in nationalist areas, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government and police officials helped ensure public order.

From July 2003 through May 2004, the Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 490 anti-Semitic incidents in the country. CST recorded 40 assaults and 69 instances of desecration and damage to property. In August 2003, a group of teenagers threw stones and shouted racial abuse at a hall of residence in Swansea occupied by holidaying Orthodox Jewish families in what police describe as a racially motivated incident. The events followed the desecration of the Swansea Synagogue in July 2003 by suspected far-right attackers. The media also reported instances of desecration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Nazi slogans and swastikas were painted on 11 Jewish gravestones at a Southampton cemetery in July 2003, and in August 2003, 20 Jewish gravestones were damaged at Rainsough cemetery in Manchester. Police investigated the attack as a racist incident. In November 2003, vandals desecrated 21 graves at a Jewish cemetery in Chatham, East Kent.

Advocacy groups report an increase in negative attitudes towards Islam and attacks against Muslims in the country after September 11, 2001. In the fall of 2001, there were isolated attacks against Muslims. Targets included persons wearing traditional Islamic dress and buildings such as mosques and Muslim-owned businesses. The London-based Islamic Human Rights Commission reported 344 incidents of violence against Muslims in the year after September 11, 2001, including at least three clubbing incidents with bats, the attack on a child with pepper spray, and the stabbing of a Muslim woman. The Government quickly condemned the violence and responded by including "religiously aggravated offenses" as part of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act 2001.

In June the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (a nongovernmental commission set up by the Runnymede Trust) issued a report criticizing the Government for failing to do enough to incorporate Muslim communities into British public life. Muslim groups themselves have also expressed concern that the application of antiterrorism legislation has disproportionately targeted the Muslim community. In December 2003, after a meeting with representatives of the Muslim Council of Britain, the Home Secretary gave assurances that he would not tolerate inappropriate use of antiterrorism powers and agreed to begin quarterly meetings with Muslim leaders to discuss issues affecting British Muslims.

The Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR), a Muslim advocacy group, recorded 29 incidents of assault or threatening behavior against Muslims during the year. They believe many more went unreported. Several incidents involved assault

and threatening behavior toward Muslims wearing traditional clothing, including women in headscarves. In February vandals attacked a mosque in Chester, smashing windows and shouting abuse at the imam and visitors. A number of incidents of violence and threats against Muslims, including an anthrax hoax against a mosque in Birmingham and the abduction and assault of a schoolgirl in Essex, took place in the days following the Madrid bombings in March. Also in March, at least 40 Muslim graves were desecrated at a cemetery in southeast London. The Metropolitan police investigated the incident as a hate crime. In April police investigated a "suspicious" fire at the Al-Khoei Islamic Center in London. The fire destroyed a large tent erected for a religious festival. No arrests had been made by the end of the period covered by this report.

Employment discrimination on religious grounds is prohibited by law in Northern Ireland. A broad network of laws, regulations, and oversight bodies work to ensure that there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious faiths.

The country 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." In fall 2003, the Deputy Chief of Mission hosted an Iftaar dinner for Muslim leaders in the country at the end of Ramadan. The Embassy's outreach to religious communities continued during the period covered by this report. On the second anniversary of September 11, 2001, Embassy staff attended a multifaith service at West London Synagogue. Embassy officers also spoke on religious tolerance on numerous occasions at venues including the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies, the Oxford Jewish Society, the Sternberg Center for Judaism, and the Three Faiths Forum. In June the Embassy hosted a roundtable on "Religion and the Media" with domestic journalists from both the mainstream and religious press and co-sponsored a visit to the country by Dr. Judea Pearl (father of slain journalist Daniel Pearl) and Dr. Akhbar Ahmed (Ibn Khaldin Professor of Islamic Studies at American University), who conducted a public Jewish-Muslim dialogue. 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 Northern Ireland, long-standing issues related to religion have been part of the political and economic struggle largely 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 the two largest religious communities.

UZBEKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, in practice the Government restricted 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 churches 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 no overall change 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, a banned extremist Islamic political party. During the period covered by this report, the Government released 704 individuals as part of a large-scale amnesty. The number arrested continued to decline through the end of 2003; however, there was a reported increase in arrests in January and February, centered mostly in Tashkent City and Region. The Government took into custody several hundred individuals following a series of terrorist incidents in Bukhara and Tashkent in late March and early April; the overwhelming majority of detainees were identified as having belonged to Hizb ut-Tahrir or other so-called "Wahabbi" groups. Most of these were released after questioning, but an estimated 150 to 200 remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report. In contrast with previous years, women who participated in demonstrations demanding the release of male relatives were not charged with criminal offenses. Several of these demonstrations were larger than in previous years; nevertheless, those who were detained were typically given an administrative fine and released quickly. 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. 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religions contributed to religious freedom; however, ethnic Uzbek Christians continued to face harassment. This is particularly true for recent converts and for residents of smaller communities, who often face pressure from neighbors, family, and employers. Hizbut-Tahrir continued to circulate strongly anti-Semitic leaflets, the text of which often originates 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 also 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 Cultural and Religious Pluralism in Uzbekistan and the United States program, and a Community Connection group on the topic of Islam in a Religiously Diverse United States.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of 172,742 square miles and its population is estimated to be 26,410,416. There are no official statistics on membership in various faiths; however, it is estimated that 88 to 90 percent of the population are nominally Muslim. Less than 10 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 country's 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, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Hare Krishnas. In addition, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Ashkenazi and Bukharan Jews remain in the country, concentrated in the main cities of Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. At least 80,000 others have emigrated to Israel or the United States since independence.

The law prohibits proselytizing, which tends to constrain the activities of foreign missionaries, particularly those who seek to minister among the country's Muslim population. In practice, many ignore this 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.

Although the laws treat all religious confessions equally, the Government shows its support for the country's Muslim heritage by funding an Islamic university and subsidizing citizens' participation in the Hajj. 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.

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. 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.

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 Ministry of Justice also has cited this requirement in explaining local officials' decisions. The Jehovahs' Witnesses Tashkent congregation has had its registration application denied on these grounds. Some groups, such as the Tashkent International Church, have been reluctant to invest in the purchase of a 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.

The number of mosques has increased significantly from the approximately 80 permitted during the Soviet era, but has decreased from the more than 4,000 that opened after the country gained independence and before registration procedures were in place. New mosques, as well as those closed in the early 1990s, continue to face difficulties gaining registration.

Some Christian groups have applied for registration at local levels and were denied or never received an official answer during the period covered by this report, including the Greater Grace Christian Church of Samarkand, the International Church of Tashkent, the Mir (Peace) Presbyterian Church in Nukus, the United Church of Evangelical Christians/Baptists in Tashkent, the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Andijan, and Jehovah's Witnesses. 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 January 1, the Government had registered 2,153 religious congregations and organizations, 1,965 of which were Muslim. This represents an increase of 34 since the period covered by the last report. The 188 registered minority religious groups include: 61 Korean Christian, 36 Russian Orthodox, 22 Pentecostal ("Full Gospel"), 24 Baptist, 11 Seventh-day Adventist, 7 Jewish, 6 Baha'i, 4 Lutheran, 4 "New Apostolic," 5 Roman Catholic, 2 Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 Krishna Consciousness groups, 1 Bible Society, 1 Temple of Buddha, 1 Christian "Voice of God" Church, and 1 Armenian Apostolic.

A December 11, 2003, Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers outlining new registration requirements for international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) could restrict the activities of international faith-based NGOs. Statements by government officials, as well as documents disseminated to the NGOs by the Ministry of Justice, indicate 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 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 does not appear to have been enforced during the period covered by this report.

The Criminal and Civil codes contain stiff penalties for violating the Religion Law and other statutes on religious activities. Prohibited activities include organizing an illegal religious group, 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 training religious personnel.

These restrictions contravene most internationally recognized standards of religious freedom. In the summer of 2003, a panel of experts convened by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR), reviewed the 1998 Religion Law and associated criminal and civil statutes and concluded that they were in violation of international norms. The OSCE submitted 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 ODHIR recommendations, but had taken no action to enact them by the end of the period covered by this report.

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 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.

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 Hizb ut-Tahrir and other groups branded under the general term "Wahhabi," which 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 being denied registration or ordered to disband. In addition, the code punishes any participation in such a group with up to 3 years in prison. The code also provides for 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 theoretical distinction between illegal and prohibited groups and frequently convict members of disapproved Muslim groups under both statutes.

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 is determined to prevent the spread of the Party of Islamic Liberation (Hizb ut-Tahrir), an extremist organization founded in 1952 in Jordanian-administered East Jerusalem and headquartered in London. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir maintains that it is committed to non-violence, the political party's strongly anti-Semitic and anti-Western literature calls for secular governments, including Uzbekistan, to be replaced with a world-wide Islamic government called the Caliphate.

In the spring of 2002, President Islam Karimov reaffirmed on national television his intention to eradicate Hizb ut-Tahrir in the country. Following the terrorist attacks of March 28 through April 1, President Karimov again stressed the dangers posed by Hizb ut-Tahrir. Although the Government backed away from initial comments directly linking Hizb ut-Tahrir to the attacks, President Karimov and other members of the Government on several occasions repeated their view that the group's ideology fosters extremism and terrorism. Persons accused of involvement with the organization, which often involves nothing more than having attended one of its meetings or passing along banned Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets, continued to be subject to prison sentences of up to 15 years.

The Government is also determined 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 long imprisonment.

Religious groups are prohibited from forming political parties and social movements.

The Government's harsh treatment of suspected religious extremists has generally suppressed outward expressions of religious piety. 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.

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. The source of funding for these mosques is unknown. According to congregants, supporters of the Panjera mosque have submitted documents every year but have not received a response. Approximately 500 persons meet for prayer at the mosque on feast days. In March, several dozen residents of the Akhunbabayev District of Fergana held a public demonstration to protest local authorities' repeated refusal to register a locally funded village mosque, one of six in the area that have been denied registration. In April, a civil court in Fergana ruled in favor of a local activist advocating for the mosque's registration, arguing that the district authorities had unlawfully impeded the mosque's application. The mosque has since opened.

Local authorities have continued to block the registration of evangelical Christian congregations, particularly those that attempt to minister to ethnic Uzbeks. The Peace Church in Nukus, Karakalpakstan, which 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 Andijan, 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, to improper certification by fire inspectors. Congregants of a Protestant denomination in Chirchick, Tashkent Oblast reported that the local Ministry of Justice denied their church's registration application because of "grammatical errors." All of these churches have ethnic Uzbek members.

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 Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs Committee 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 continues to meet in a restaurant.

Baptist churches associated with the International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians/Baptists, a denomination that rejects registration on principle, continue to come under pressure from local authorities. According to media accounts, the pastor of a small Baptist congregation in Angren, was summoned to the local prosecutor's office and asked for a list of church attendees. However when the U.S. Embassy followed up with the reporter and the Tashkent office of the International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians/Baptists could not provide further details or contact information for the pastor.

The Jehovah's Witnesses continue to focus their registration efforts on obtaining registration in Tashkent. The Tashkent City authorities have refused to sanction 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. 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 Hizb ut-Tahrir, as security threats. There are some signs that this attitude may be softening, as illustrated by the October 2003 decision to overturn the conviction of Marat Mudarisov. However, in general local officials and representatives of the religious establishment continue to express apprehension about the group's missionary activities.

Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. Police occasionally broke up meetings of unregistered evangelical congregations and detained their members. On August 15, 2003, authorities arrested five men and three women members of an unregistered Baptist Church in the village of Khalkabad in Namangan. The men were sentenced to 10 days' imprisonment for attending services in a private home and reportedly made to pay $8 (8,160 soum) to cover the costs of their time in jail. The women were fined $7 (6,770 soum). On August 24, 2003, police in Nukus raided the Peace Protestant Church, reportedly for the fourth time, and questioned the congregants. Two of the Church's leaders were fined the equivalent of $28 (27,300 soum) in September 2003 for holding illegal religious services. According to Forum 18, on September 7, 2003, police in Chirchik disrupted the Sunday services of the unregistered Friendship Protestant Church. On December 11, 2003, a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Zhuma was detained when found conducting a private religious gathering. Later that day, he was taken to court, found guilty, and sentenced to 3 days in jail. On March 9, 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, a criminal court fined six members of a Protestant church in Tashkent for holding unauthorized religious meetings in a private home.

Throughout the period covered by this report, members of Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested and fined for illegally teaching religion and proselytizing.

In May 2002, the Committee on Religious Affairs told a group of evangelical pastors that they no longer would be allowed to preach in the Uzbek language—the official national language and the one linked most closely to the majority Muslim population. This issue has not been fully resolved. The control over publication and distribution of religious literature has been used to restrict the distribution of Bibles in the Uzbek language; however, the CRA has made some concessions on publication and distribution of Uzbek-language Bibles.

The Government requires that the religious censor approve all religious literature; however, in practice a number of other government entities concerned with religion have a chance to suppress religious literature that 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 sanctioned Islamic literature. The list contains more than 200 titles. 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 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 extremist may lead to arrest and prosecution. Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets are prohibited categorically.

Baptists belonging to an unregistered congregation in Navoi claimed that on September 27, 2003, police confiscated religious books that the church had been distributing in a mobile library; members were fined. On February 14, according to press reports, police in Karakalpakstan confiscated religious literature from a Jehovah's Witness in Nukus. The Jehovah's Witnesses report that even their registered congregations in Chirchik and Fergana have been unable to import religious material. On January 4, the home of a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Dzhizak was searched and religious literature was confiscated. The police brought her to court; however, after the intervention of a local lawyer, the police withdrew the charges. Although the woman was not charged, the confiscated religious literature was not returned to her.

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 three separate cases during the reporting period, Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent were convicted for proselytizing and given administrative fines. On December 20, 2003, two Jehovah's Witnesses in Karshi were arrested while preaching door-to-door. On January 23, their case was heard by an administrative judge, who ordered the prosecution to base its case on Article 240 of the Administrative Code, which enforces the ban on proselytizing, rather than Article 241, which governs religious teaching. The case has not yet been retried.

In the weeks immediately following the March–April terrorist attacks, Muslim women reported feeling widespread unease about wearing the hijab, particularly after law enforcement authorities circulated pictures of one of the alleged suicide bombers dressed in conservative Muslim attire. School administrators pressured female students not to wear the hijab. 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.

Religious instruction is limited by law to officially sanctioned religious schools and "state-certified" instructors. The law permits no private instruction and provides for fines upon violation. 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 to those planning to become imams or religious teachers. 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. Other faiths offer religious education through their religious centers.

The law prohibits the teaching of religious subjects in schools, the private teaching of religious principles, and the teaching of religion to minors without parental consent. On February 17, Vladimir Kushchevoy, a Jehovah's Witness resident in Samarkand, was sentenced to 3 years of corrective labor for providing unauthorized religious instruction. Kushchevoy's sentence was later reduced, following an appeal, to 1 year of probation. On November 27, 2003, the pastor of a registered Baptist church in Urgench was levied an administrative fine of $23 (22,000 soum) for allegedly conducting religious work among children without their parents' permission. The administrative court determined that the church's summer camps and children's club enticed children into the church without their parents' consent.

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 madrassas 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 radical Islamic political party Hizb ut-Tahrir. 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.

Following the terrorist attacks of March and early April, the Government took into custody several hundred persons, the overwhelming majority of whom were identified as having belonged to Hizb ut-Tahrir or various Wahabbi 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 150 to 200 remained in custody, including a popular imam in Kashkadaria, Rustam Klichiyev. There have been some credible allegations of torture. Trials of the first terrorist suspects were expected to begin later in 2004.

Individuals arrested on suspicion of extremism often face particularly severe mistreatment in custody, including torture. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of individuals detained in connection with extremist activities dying as a result of beatings or torture. In March, Abdurrahman Narzaullayev, 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 convicted Hizb ut-Tahrir members Orif Ershanov (May 2003) and Mirzakomil Avazov and Khusnuddin Olimov (August 2002).

In July and August 2003, international observers monitored at least two trials of alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members in which witnesses and defendants stated that their testimonies had been elicited through torture. In neither case were these allegations of torture investigated by the presiding judge. All were convicted.

There were numerous credible reports that authorities in several prisons mistreated prisoners in connection with a series of demonstrations that took place during the month of Ramadan. 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 October 2003 to demand that prison authorities adjust labor and eating schedules to accommodate the Ramadan fast. The protests began in the Jaslyk prison in Karakalpakstan, but spread to penal facilities in Karshi, Zarafshan, and Navoi. In response to these demonstrations, several prisoners were reportedly beaten in Jaslyk, while in Karshi more than 100 Hizb ut-Tahrir prisoners were placed in punishment cells, where the heat was turned off and the prisoners made to sleep on the floor; many of these prisoners reportedly were beaten. Relatives of prisoners in Navoi report that inmates who participated in the protest actions were subject to additional reprisals in early March and April. Among those participating in these prison demonstrations was Abdurrahman Narzaullayev, whose death is mentioned above.

On May 16, 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.

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.

There were fewer reports that evangelical Christians were beaten than in years past. According to a posting by the Internet reporting service Forum 18, a National Security Service (NSS) officer in Khorezm called in two members of an unregistered Baptist church and questioned them about their funding and foreign associations. According to Forum 18, one of the men summoned for questioning was hit several times. Local authorities in Khorezm strenuously denied the allegations.

Estimates from credible sources suggest that as many as 4,500 of the estimated 5,000 to 5,500 political prisoners being held in detention are members of Hizb ut-Tahrir. It is difficult to estimate precisely the number of persons arrested on charges of extremism. Most observers agree that arrests continued to decrease through the end of 2003. However, there appeared to have been a spike in arrests

in the first 2 to 3 months of 2004, particularly in Tashkent City and Oblast. Overall the number of individuals taken into custody remained well below the highs from 1999 to 2001. Arrests continued through May in connection with the March–April terrorist attacks, with an estimated 150 to 200 in detention at the end of this reporting period.

As in previous years, a large percentage of those taken into custody on charges of extremism were arrested arbitrarily. Even in cases where individuals are members of Hizb ut-Tahrir or other extremist organizations, the authorities frequently failed to produce credible evidence that the individuals committed the acts for which they were arrested. Family members of individuals 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, but in many cases the relatives' guilt is only by association.

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, none 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 MVD offices maintained a list of women who participated in protests, and detained many for questioning in the aftermath of the March–April bombings. Twenty-one women imprisoned for religious extremism, many of whom had participated in demonstrations in the past, were released under the 2003–2004 amnesty.

The police routinely 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. According to an unconfirmed Forum 18 News Service report, on June 5, police and secret police raided the home of a Nukus Protestant warning that if she did not stop preaching Christianity she would have drugs planted on her and would be sentenced to prison.

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 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, Article 159, and belonging to an illegal religious organization, Article 216. He was due to be released under the terms of his sentence on July 17, 2003.

There were fewer reports during the period covered by this report that Christian evangelicals were detained. Nevertheless, such incidents did occur, including the arrest of eight Baptists in Namangan, held in prison for 10 days and made to pay $7 (6,440 soum), and the detention of two leaders of a Protestant church in Nukus. 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 Andijan continued to face harassment from local officials. In January, local security service officers reportedly warned Tuichiev's mother that unless he halted church activities, a case would be brought against him for operating without registration.

Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were also subjected to police questioning, searches, and administrative fines. On July 28 and 30, 2003, police questioned the family of a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent; on August 7, 2003, a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses was ordered to pay an administrative fine of $27 (27,000 soum) for holding an unauthorized religious service. Similar administrative penalties were levied against Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent on March 5 and March 31. On August 1, 2003 the NSS interrogated another member of the Jehovah's Witness in Tashkent for 3 hours about the Jehovah's Witnesses' membership and activities.

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). The former Mufti, a revered figure in the country, has also been permitted to host 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 has argued 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.

Following peaceful protests in the Akhunbabayev District of Fergana Province, a civil court in April ruled that local authorities had unlawfully impeded attempts to register a village mosque. Local residents and community activists who have advocated for the mosque for years cited the ruling as an important precedent.

On August 22, 2003, the Cabinet of Ministers issued a decree that made diplomas granted by madrassas equivalent to other diplomas, thus enabling graduates of those institutions to continue their education at the university level.

On January 6, the Religious Affairs Committee lifted all quotas on travel to Saudi Arabia for the hajj pilgrimage. Previously, a quasi-governmental board selected pilgrims in a process widely viewed as corrupt.

In March, the Government completed an amnesty of 704 political prisoners, the vast majority of whom were convicted of Islamic extremism. This followed an amnesty in 2002–2003 of 923 such prisoners, as well as the 2001 amnesty of 860.

On October 8, 2003, the Presidium of the Tashkent City Criminal Court overturned the conviction of Marat Mudarisov, a member of the unregistered Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Tashkent. Mudarisov had been sentenced to a 3-year suspended sentence in 2002 for inciting religious hatred.

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 move. 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 terrorist attacks, overall there continued to be increased tolerance for the use of head coverings by Muslim women. Over the period covered by this report, the hijab was seen more frequently in Tashkent's Old City and the more religiously conservative parts of the Fergana Valley and the southern provinces of Kashkadaria and Surkhondaria. There were reports that at least one university began readmitting women who were expelled in 1997 and 1998 for wearing the hijab; however, this trend was countered by reports that, following the March–April terrorist bombings, another university expelled some women for wearing the hijab. The Religious Affairs Committee 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 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. Older men wearing prayer robes are not an uncommon sight.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are amicable relations among the various religious communities.

There was no pattern of discrimination against Jewish persons. Synagogues function openly; Hebrew education, Jewish cultural events, and the publication of a com-

munity 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 fliers signed by Hizb ut-Tahrir have been distributed throughout the country; however, these views were not representative of the feelings of the vast majority of the population.

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 of societal attitudes. The Government has increasingly expressed concern that Christian evangelicals will inflame social tensions by proselytizing among ethnic Uzbeks and has attempted to limit such organizations' 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. 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 concern on 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.

When the U.S. Embassy received information concerning difficulties faced by religious groups, it intervened on their behalf, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Greater Grace Church in Samarkand, the Hushhabbar Church in Guliston, a Catholic Church in Urgench, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent and Fergana, a Pentecostal church in Andijan, an international nondenominational church in Tashkent, and several faith-based foreign aid organizations.

Embassy officials met with numerous Muslim clergymen and 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. The Community Connections project, a program conducted in cooperation with the International Research and Exchange (IREX), has brought local Islamic leaders to the U.S., 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 fosters 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. Though 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 was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. 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, in limited instances, the conduct of religious services by registered, non-Muslim faiths in the capital, which are open to the public. The Government continues to require religious organizations to register; non-Islamic proselytizing is illegal; and the importation of religious texts still faces lengthy delays for government approval. Self-proclaimed Muslim terrorists continue 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 period covered by this report.

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 who live in the desert town of Ghardaia, practice non-mainstream forms of Islam or practice other religions, but there is minimal societal discrimination against them.

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 a total land area of 6,406,880 square miles, and its population is approximately 33 million. More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. 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 leaders of the Christian churches, Methodists and evangelists 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 evangelists (mostly in the Kabylie region) and approximately 300 Catholics. The Jewish population is virtually nonexistent. There are no reliable figures on the numbers of atheists in the country, and very few persons identify themselves as such.

For security reasons, due mainly to the civil conflict, Christians concentrated in the large cities of Algiers, Constantine, 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 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.

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 provide effective remedies for 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, prohibiting proselytizing, 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 in the capital, which were open to the public.

The Government recognizes the Islamic holy days of 'Eid Al-Adha, 'Eid Al-Fitr, Awal Moharem, Achoura, 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. To date 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 the Methodists, 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. However, 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."

The Government 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 among 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.

On February 20, the imam of the Emir Abdelkader Mosque in Constantine attacked the independent press during the Friday sermon broadcasted on state television and radio. The imam said 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, during the period covered by this report, sought to expand its control over the training of imams through a government-run Islamic educational institute. This institute would ensure that all imams are of the highest educational caliber and present messages in line with government guidelines in place to stem Islamic fanaticism. At the end of the period covered by this report, no school actually had been established.

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 until it is virtually nonexistent due to fears of terrorist violence, and the synagogue in Algiers has been abandoned. 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, lengthy delays of 5 to 6 months are experienced in obtaining such approval. 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, and in general non-Islamic religious texts no longer are difficult to find. Non-Islamic religious music and video selections also are available. The government-owned radio stations provided broadcast time to 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 "abayah." 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 primary and secondary schools operate in the country; however, the Government did not extend recognition to these institutions during the period covered by this report, and, therefore, private school students must register as independent students within the public school system to take national baccalaureate examinations.

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.

Some aspects of Shari'a, as interpreted and applied in the country, discriminate against women. The 1984 Family Code, which is based in large part on Shari'a, treats women as minors under the legal guardianship of a husband or male relative. For example, a woman must obtain her father's approval to marry. While there are no limitations on or burdens of legal proof required of men seeking divorce, the Family Code limits a woman's ability to gain a divorce for reasons other than seven codified provisions. Divorce can be granted to wives whose husbands are impotent, abusive, adulterers, or convicted criminals, and can be granted in instances where the husband has been absent from the family for more than a year, refrained from sexual relations for more than four months, or committed an "immoral infraction" such as pedophilia. In rare instances, a woman can seek divorce through "purchasing" her freedom from her husband through a practice know as "khlouay." In keeping with Islamic law, husbands generally keep the right to the family's home in the case of divorce. Custody of the children normally is awarded to the mother, but she may not enroll them in a school or take them out of the country without the father's authorization. Only males are able to confer citizenship on their children. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims. However, Muslim men however may marry non-Muslim women.

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 and independent media publications and broadcasts is extremely 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

The country's decade-long civil conflict has 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. Approximately 100,000 to 150,000 civilians, terrorists, and security forces have been killed during the past 12 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 period covered by this report. 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. Converts also expose themselves to the risk of attack by radical extremists.

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.

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 leader of the High Islamic Council, the Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs, and moderate Islamic political parties. Embassy officials promoted religious freedom in speeches with university students by describing the high level of tolerance that all faiths, including Islam, enjoy in the United States. The Embassy maintained frequent contact with three Islamic political parties (Movement for Peaceful Society, El Islah, and Ennahda) and met with the Wafa Party, whose legal status 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 received 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 right.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In the past, the Government did not tolerate political dissent, including from religious groups or leaders; however, in 2001 the King par-

doned 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 a total area of 231 square miles, and its population is approximately 670,000. 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 approximately 38 percent of the total population. Roughly 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, including 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 Labor and 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 Labor and 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 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 the Baha'i faith is an offshoot of Islam. According to Islam, this is illegal and therefore the Ministry refuses officially to recognize the religion, but it allows the community to gather and worship freely. The community has not sought official recognition in many years.

Unregistered Christian congregations likely 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, the press reported that 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 country observes the Muslim feasts of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday, 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. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Government tried to prevent many of these processions and put many participants in jail. The Government no longer hinders these processions. The Ministry of Information provides full media coverage of Ashura events.

Notable dignitaries from virtually every religion and denomination visit the country and frequently meet with the Government and civic leaders. During the week of April 15, Passion Week, 400 persons attended a 3-day convention and a series of lectures given by Catholicos of India of Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church Dr. Baselius Thomas I. On May 5, the supreme head of the Mar Thoma Church, ordained Bishop Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostum, Mar Thoma Metropolitan, visited the country to address the spiritual needs of the local parish.

From September 20 to 22, the country hosted an intra-Islamic ecumenical conference, "The Conference of Approximation between the Islamic Faiths." Its goal was to improve Sunni-Shi'a dialogue and bring the Islamic community closer together.

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'afari (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 period covered by this report. 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 period covered by this report.

The Government discourages proselytizing by non-Muslims and 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 readily are available. However, during the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Information prohibited the sale of 14 books written by Sunni authors who converted to the Shi'a sect of Islam. 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.

On April 2, the Ministry of Information banned Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of Christ" because, according to the Ministry, Islamic Shari'a forbids 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. In the past, stateless residents who did not possess Bahraini passports had difficulties arranging travel to religious sites abroad. However, the Government addressed this problem by granting citizenship to thousands of previously stateless residents. 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 2002, the Government licensed for the first time a school to provide students with a Shi'a religious curriculum designed to educate the next generation of Shi'a religious scholars.

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. Currently the National Evangelical Church allows the church to use its facilities for early morning services. However, the facility only accommodates half of the church's congregation at any one time.

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 a letter dated April 27, 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 period covered by this report.

In 2003, the Ministry of Interior lifted its ban on policewoman wearing headscarves (hijab). Also in 2003, by Royal Decree, the King allowed women to drive while fully veiled.

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, a Sunni woman—in the absence of a direct male heir—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 legally may marry a non-Muslim man if the man 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

In the past, the Government held in detention hundreds of Shi'a, including religious leaders, for offenses involving "national security." In 2001, the King pardoned and released all political prisoners, detainees, and exiles, including Hassan Sultan and Haji Hassan Jasrallah, two Shi'a clerics associated with prominent cleric Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, as well as Shi'a political activists Haasan Mushaimaa and Abdul Wahab Hussein, who had been in detention for more than 5 years.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Although there are notable 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 discrimination, 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, but some small groups worship in their homes.

In 2002, 70 graves at the St. Christopher's Church cemetery were desecrated. During the period covered by this report, the Government paid to restore the graveyard. According to the wishes of the Church, no monument was erected. No reports on the results of 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 (Jaafari 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 April, 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 Jaafari Awqaf has sought police assistance to investigate the crime.

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 official written dialogue takes place between U.S. Embassy officials and government contacts on matters of religion. One such example is the memorandum received by the Embassy each year from the Government in response to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy facilitated a meeting between a member of the Consultative (Shura) Council and representatives of a Christian church seeking land to establish a church. The Consultative Council member arranged for a meeting with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to review the church's request for land. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Ministry had taken no action.

EGYPT

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religion, although the Government places restrictions on this right. According to the Constitution, Islam is the official state religion and Shari'a (Islamic law) is the primary source of legislation; religious practices that conflict with the official interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited. However, since the Government does not consider the practice of Christianity or Judaism to conflict with Shari'a, for the most part members of the non-Muslim minority worship without harassment and may maintain links with coreligionists in other countries. Members of religions that are not recognized by the Government, such as the Baha'i Faith, may 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. In January, the Government established a National Human Rights Council (NHRC), headed by a Coptic Christian. The NHRC was entrusted with protecting and improving the status of human rights, including religious freedom.

The prosecution failed to bring a successful case against those alleged to be responsible for killing 21 Christians during the 2000 sectarian strife early in the town of al-Kush, Upper Egypt. 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 in this incident. The Court's decision left public prosecutors and human rights activists with no further legal options. An investigation of police torture of dozens of mostly Christian detainees that took place during the inquiry of a 1998 incident involving the killing of two Copts in al-Kush made little progress

and has appeared effectively closed since 2001. A Coptic Christian was convicted and sentenced for the two murders; his appeal, which has been pending for 4 years, had not been heard by the end of the period covered by this report.

Other abuses included the arrest of nine Shi'a Muslims in December 2003 and March. Five were released within several weeks; three were detained without charge, two of whom were not released until April and June. The third and another individual arrested in March were still in detention without charge at the end of the period covered by this report. There were credible reports that at least three of the four individuals held in detention were tortured. The Government also denied identity papers, birth certificates, and marriage licenses to members of the very small Baha'i community and offered no legal means for the small number of converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status; however, the Government does not legally discriminate between Muslim and non-Muslim converts. The Government also continued to prosecute a small number of citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs and practices that "insult heavenly religions."

There generally continued to be religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society during the period covered by this report. The al-Kush case has become a symbol of sectarian tensions, possibly violent, that continued to exist in the country.

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 President Hosni Mubarak and other senior government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 370,308 square miles, and its population is approximately 70.5 million, of whom almost 90 percent are Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims constitute less than 1 percent of the population. Approximately 8 to 10 percent of citizens are Christians, 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 17 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 has been estimated to be between several hundred and two thousand. 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 and engage predominately in education, social, and development work. The Government generally tolerates these groups if they do not proselytize.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religion; however, the Government places restrictions on this right. According to the Constitution, Islam is the official state religion, and Shari'a is the primary source of legislation; religious practices that conflict with the official interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited. However, since the Government does not consider the practice of Christianity or Judaism to conflict with Shari'a, for the most part members of the non-Muslim minority worship without legal harassment and may maintain links with coreligionists in other countries. Members of other religions that are not recognized by the Government, such as the Baha'i Faith, may experience personal and collective hardship.

For a religious denomination to be officially recognized, a request must be submitted to the Religious Affairs Department at the Ministry of Interior, which assesses whether the proposed religion would pose a threat or upset national unity or social peace. The 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 religion according to Law 15 of 1927. If a religious group chooses to bypass the official registration process, participants could be 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 Constitution requires elementary and secondary schools to offer religious instruction. Public and private schools provide religious instruction according to the faith of the student. During the period covered by this report, the Minister of Education denied charges that his plan to introduce courses on rational ethics into the national curriculum was an attempt to phase out the teaching of religion in public schools.

The Government continued to encourage interfaith dialogue. The religious establishment of Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Awqaf (Islamic Religious Endowments) engage in interfaith discussions, both domestically and abroad. Government literacy programs promoted reading materials that encourage mutual tolerance. During the period covered by this report, the Government formed the NHRC, 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 its president and named prominent Copts to 5 of the council's 25 seats.

The following religious holidays are designated national holidays: 'Eid Al-Fitr, 'Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic new year, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, 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 monitors their sermons; however, it does not similarly contribute to the building, repair, or funding of Christian churches. In April, the Minister of Awqaf announced that of the more than 82,000 mosques in the country, the Government controls administratively 62,000 regular mosques and 16,000 mosques located in private buildings. The Government annexes new mosques every year, but the process does not keep pace with new mosque construction.

The contemporary interpretation of an 1856 Ottoman decree still in force requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to build a place 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. These conditions involve factors such as the location of the proposed site, the religious composition of the surrounding community, and the proximity of other churches and mosques. The Ottoman decree also required the head of state to approve permits for the repair of church facilities.

In 1996, human rights activist Mamdouh Naklah filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the 1934 decree, which was based on the 1856 Ottoman decree. In 2002, the State Commissioners' Body, which is essentially responsible for reviewing lawsuits made against the Government, issued a "final" advisory opinion, rejecting the lawsuit on the grounds that the challenged decree was issued before the Commissioners' Body was established in 1946 and thus is excluded from the Body's legal jurisdiction. Subsequently, in an April 2003 hearing, a judge ruled that no further consideration of the lawsuit was warranted. In June 2003, the Administrative Court, which is part of the State Council, similarly rejected the case on the grounds that the decree in question was issued in 1934, before the establishment of the State Council, established in 1947. The Administrative Court argued that it could not rule on a law predating its establishment. Naklah's appeal before the Higher Administrative Court was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Since 1998, presidential decrees are required only for the building of new churches, while repair permits are issued at the Governorate level. In 1999, in response to strong criticism of the Ottoman decree, President Mubarak issued a decree making the repair of all places of worship subject to a 1976 civil construction code. The decree places repair of churches and mosques on equal footing before the law and facilitates church repairs. However, local permits for such repairs are still subject to approval by security authorities. Even though mosque and church repairs are now subject to the same laws, enforcement of the laws appears to be much stricter for churches than for mosques. Security officials also may 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 governor toward the church and on their personal relationships with the local Christian church's representatives.

According to statistics published by the Government's Official Gazette, during the period covered by this report President Mubarak approved seven permits for church-related construction compared with the nine permits reported during the previous period. Three of these permits were for evangelical Christian churches and four were for Coptic churches. However, government officials have asserted that most permits issued are not published in the Gazette. According to these officials, 254 permits for the building and repair of churches were issued between January 1 and June 15.

Overall, the approval process for church construction continued to be time-consuming and insufficiently responsive to the requests of Christians. Although President Mubarak reportedly has approved all requests for permits presented to him, Christians maintain that the Interior Ministry delays—in some instances indefinitely—submission to the President of their requests. 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, the country's Supreme Constitutional Court dismissed a case an individual brought against the Coptic Orthodox Church. The judges ruled that the Constitution required that 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 other legal cases they are pursuing.

Despite this ruling, numerous complaints of delayed church construction and repair projects continued during the period covered by this report. Among the many complaints was the case of St. George Church in Dafesh, a majority Christian community near Assiyut, Upper Egypt. After a wait of many years, in 1998 the parish obtained a permit 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, prompting the Government to freeze the project, which remained halted at the end of the period covered by this report. The congregation continues to worship at the older site.

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 is 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.

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.

As a result of restrictions, some communities use private buildings and apartments for religious services or build without permits. An Orthodox church, St. John the Baptist, in Awlad Ilyas, near Assiyut, has been using the church's courtyard for prayers because local police prevented repairs to the church structure in 2001. Repairs were halted because authorities believed that the church would enlarge its size by extending the building into the churchyard. After negotiations with state security officers, the church received permission to demolish the existing wall to extend its size. However, after the newspaper Al-Watani had published an article exposing this issue and the outcome, state security officials halted construction a second time. At the end of the period covered by this report, construction had not resumed and the Church was still waiting for the Minister of Interior to permit resumption of repairs.

The Government continued to try citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs. On January 28, a State Security Emergency Court issued a verdict against Sunni Muslims Sayyed Tolba, Gamal Sultan, and 17 others, superseding a 2002 verdict in which

Tolba had been sentenced to 3 years. The court sentenced Tolba and Sultan to a year's imprisonment and gave suspended sentences to the remaining defendants, after finding them guilty of practicing religious beliefs "deviant from Islamic Shari'a."

Political parties based on religion are illegal. Pursuant to this law, the Muslim Brotherhood is an illegal organization. Muslim Brothers speak openly and publicly about their views, although they do not explicitly identify themselves as members of the organization, and they remain subject to arbitrary treatment and pressure from the Government. During the period covered by this report, dozens of members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested and charged with membership in an illegal organization, and several others were prevented from traveling abroad. Dozens of suspected Brotherhood members were also released during this period. 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 included mainly limiting access to polling stations but also, in some instances, violence, detentions, and arrests.

There were no new cases of authors facing trial or charges related to writings or statements considered heretical during the period covered by this report.

Various ministries are legally authorized to ban or confiscate books and other works of art upon obtaining a court order. The Islamic Research Center at Al-Azhar University has legal authority to censor, but not to confiscate, all publications dealing with the Koran and Islamic scriptural texts. In recent years, the Islamic Center has passed judgment on the suitability of nonreligious books and artistic productions, but there were no new cases 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. For example, Al-Azhar generally becomes involved if there is a formal complaint filed about a particular book. However, al-Azhar generally does not have the right to rule on secular publications. In June 2003, the Government's Ministry of Justice issued a decree authorizing Al-Azhar sheikhs to confiscate publications, tapes, speeches, and artistic materials deemed inconsistent with Islamic law; however, there were no new cases during the period covered by this report.

In December 2003, the Islamic Research Center (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 period covered by this report.

The local media, including state television and newspapers with some governmental oversight, gives prominence to Islamic programming, which sometimes implies the primacy of Islam among "the heavenly religions." For example, a program entitled "Essence of Life," which airs twice a week on state-owned Nile TV, interviews persons who have converted to Islam. The interviewer frequently praises his guests for improving their lives by having chosen "the right path." Similarly, the religion page, which appears weekly in the prominent daily al-Ahram, a privately funded newspaper with some governmental oversight, often reports on conversions to Islam and reports factually on how 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 Nile TV, they are not presented on a regular basis.

Law 263 of 1960, which is still in force, bans Baha'i institutions and community activities. 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, have been compounded since the Ministry of Interior began to upgrade its automation of civil records, including national identity cards. The Government's 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, passports, birth and death certificates, and marriage licenses. Most Baha'is have chosen the latter course.

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, presidents or deans of public universities. Christians are underrepresented in Parliament and are infrequently nominated by the Government to run in elections as National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates.

There also are few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. Although there have been improvements in a few areas, 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 Koran. In 2001, the first Christian graduated from an Arabic-language department at the Suez Canal University, but there have been no reports of Christian graduates since 2001.

Anti-Semitic sentiments appear in both the independent press and press with some governmental oversight. 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, the country's Supreme Administrative Court upheld a lower court's 2001 decision to ban an annual festival 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.

Although the Coptic Orthodox Church won a lawsuit to reclaim several plots of land in greater Cairo in 2000, there continued to be no new returns during the period covered by this report.

According to a 1995 law, 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 State recognizes only the three "heavenly religions": Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Muslim families are subject to the Personal Status Law, which draws on 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 Personal Status Law. The State does not recognize the marriages of citizen adherents 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 official 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. The 2000 Personal Status Law made it easier for a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided that she is willing to forego alimony and the return of her dowry.

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 Coptic male and Muslim female decide to marry. 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

The prosecution failed to bring a successful case against those alleged to be responsible for the killing of 21 Christians during sectarian strife in early 2000 in the town of al-Kush, in Sohag Governate, Upper Egypt. The Court of Cassation, the country's highest appellate court, upheld on June 14, the acquittal of 94 of 96 suspects who were charged with various offenses committed in this incident. The Court's decision left public prosecutors and Christian advocates with no further legal options. In the investigation of an earlier incident in al-Kush in 1998 involving the killing of two Copts, the police detained hundreds of citizens, including relatives of suspects, women, and children. Local observers reported that many of these detainees were subjected to torture and mistreatment. An investigation of police torture of the mostly Christian detainees made little progress and has appeared effec-

tively closed since 2001. Shayboub William Arsal, a Coptic Christian, was convicted and sentenced for the two murders and his appeal, which has been pending for 4 years, has not been heard. The local Christian community believes that Shayboub was accused and convicted of the crime because of his religion. The two al-Kush cases have become a symbol of sectarian tensions, possibly violent, that continued to exist in the country.

The Government at times prosecutes members of religious groups whose practices are deemed to deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs, and whose activities are believed to jeopardize communal harmony. In December 2003, eight persons were arrested by state security agents in Ras Gharib, on the Red Sea coast, apparently due to their affiliation 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, Adil Shazly, Ahmed Goma'a, and Mohammed Hamam Omar, were sent to prison in Cairo and Wadi Natroun for interrogation. There were credible reports that they were tortured and mistreated in detention. By the end of the period covered by this report, Goma'a and Omar had been released, but Shazly remained in prison.

On March 21, Mohammed Ramadan Mohammed Hussein, also known as Mohammed al-Derini, leader of an unrecognized Shi'a organization, "the Supreme Council for Descendants of the Prophet," was arrested in Cairo. Derini continued to be held without charge at the end of the period covered by this report.

In March, a State Security Emergency Court found 26 persons, including 3 Britons, guilty of membership in an illegal subversive organization (the Islamic Liberation Party) and obstructing 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.

In May, the Government confiscated the identity cards of Baha'is Hossam Ezzat Moussa and Rania Roushdy, who were applying for passports. Officials told them that they were acting on instructions from the Ministry of Interior to confiscate any identity cards belonging to Baha'is.

In 2001, the Public Prosecutor ordered the release, pending an appeal, of author Ala'a Hamed, who had been convicted of insulting Islam in a novel in 1998; his appeal was still pending at the end of the period covered by the report.

In August 2003, at the historic monastery of St. Anthony at a remote location in the eastern desert, Christian monks and supporters confronted more than 100 security personnel and numerous bulldozers deployed by the Governor of the Red Sea province to destroy a wall built by the monastery that enclosed land belonging to the State. Although they admitted they did not have title to the land enclosed by the wall, monastery leaders asserted that the wall was built at the urging of government security officials. After a tense standoff, a compromise was reached in which the Government agreed to sell the land enclosed by the wall to the monastery.

In January, Christian workers at the Patmos Center, a Coptic Orthodox social service facility on the Suez road east of Cairo, confronted soldiers and an army bulldozer dispatched from a military base adjacent to the facility. During the confrontation, one of the Christian workers was fatally struck by a private bus attempting to drive around the crowd. This incident was the latest in a series involving Patmos and the neighboring military base. The army's reported pretext for bulldozing the gate was that the Patmos Center's wall stands 50 meters from the highway, while local zoning regulations require a distance of 100 meters. Christian sources noted that the army base's perimeter wall also is only 50 meters from the road, and they charged that the army's intent was to harass the Christians until they quit the site so that it could be annexed by the military. Other observers believed the military's enmity was engendered by the "stealthy" way the church developed a Christian service facility on a site originally billed as an agricultural "desert reclamation project."

In May, a Coptic priest and two members of his church were killed while in a vehicle driven by a police officer. The officer lost control of the vehicle, and it fell into a canal. The police officer had appeared at the St. Mina Church in the village of Taha, in the Samalout district of Minya Governorate, and ordered the priest, Father Ibrahim Mikhail, to come to the police station to make a report regarding his church's unauthorized repair of a fence. In an obituary placed in the paper al-Ahram, Father Mikhail and the other victims were described as "martyrs" of the 1856 Ottoman church building decree. The deaths prompted angry reactions from local Christian leaders and emotional demonstrations from the Christian community. The police officer, who was not seriously injured in the incident, reportedly was suspended and referred for an inquiry into his actions. The Government maintained that the vehicle crash was accidental, noting that the police driver was among those

injured. The Government has advised that his actions are the subject of an investigation for possible violations of procedure.

Neither the Constitution nor the Civil and Penal Codes prohibits proselytizing, but those accused of proselytizing have been harassed by police or arrested on charges of violating Article 98(F) of the Penal Code, which prohibits citizens from ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.

In late January, four Christians were arrested by state security agents in Nuweiba, on the east coast of the Sinai Peninsula, and detained without charge. The four reportedly were found to be in possession of an undetermined amount of Christian religious materials and were apparently suspected of proselytizing. The four were released on April 3. Government sources reported that no charges would be pursued against them.

While there are no legal restrictions on the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, there are occasional reports that police harass Christians who had converted from Islam. However, government officials have asserted that this occasional harassment stems from the actions of a few individuals and is not a result of police policy.

There are no legal restrictions on the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. The law prescribes administrative steps to register such conversions. The minor children of converts to Islam, and in some cases adult children, may automatically become classified as Muslims in the eyes of the State irrespective of the status of the other spouse. This is in accordance with "established" Islamic Shari'a rule, which dictates "no jurisdiction of a non-Muslim over a Muslim."

Although not forbidden by law, the State does not recognize conversions from Islam to Christianity or other religions. In cases involving conversion from Islam to Christianity, authorities periodically charge converts with violating laws prohibiting the falsification of documents. In such instances, converts who have no legal means to register their change in religious status sometimes resort to soliciting illicit identity papers, often by submitting fraudulent supporting documents or bribing the government clerks who process the documents.

In October 2003, 20 persons were arrested and charged with document fraud after the exposure of several civil-documents clerks involved in processing falsified documents for converts. During questioning after their arrest, they were deprived of sleep, food, and water, and Yusef Soliman was beaten on several occasions. Soliman was released on November 9 and Mariam Makar on December 24. All but Makar and Soliman were released within hours of their arrest. In response to inquiries about the case, the Government asserted that Makar and Soliman were arrested for running a forgery ring. The Government maintained that the majority of those Christians who were arrested had converted to Islam and then back to Christianity for personal matters such as obtaining a divorce from their spouses (which is possible for Muslims but not recognized by the Coptic Church).

In December 2002, Malak Fahmi, a Christian, and his wife Sarah, a Christian convert from Islam, were arrested while attempting to leave the country with their two children. The couple was charged with falsification of documents. Sarah, who reportedly changed her name and religious affiliation on her marriage certificate only, stated that she did so without her husband's assistance. The couple was released in February, but they reportedly were awaiting trial on charges of document fraud at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 1997, human rights activist Mamdouh Naklah filed a lawsuit seeking the removal of the religious affiliation category from government identification cards. Naklah challenged the constitutionality of a 1994 decree by the Minister of Interior governing the issuance of new identification cards. A hearing scheduled for February 25 never took place. Upon his appearance, the court informed Nakhlah that the case documents had been withdrawn and forwarded to the president of the State's Council, a highly unusual procedure. No new hearing date was set, and it appears unlikely that the case will be heard.

In April, an administrative court issued a verdict allowing a Christian woman, 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 State 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." By the end of the period covered by this report, it remained unclear whether this ruling would set a broad precedent for the Government's treatment of converts from Islam.

An estimated several thousand persons are imprisoned because of alleged support for or membership in Islamist groups seeking to overthrow the Government. The Government states that these persons are 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 they suspect 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 reports of forced conversions of Coptic 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 girl who converts to Islam when she marries a Muslim male. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media. According to the Government, in such cases the girl must meet with her priest or the head of her church before she is allowed to convert. However, in cases of marriage between an underage Christian girl and a Muslim male, there are credible reports of government harassment, especially by the police, or lack of cooperation with Christian families that attempt to regain custody of their daughters. There are similar reports in these cases of the failure of the authorities to uphold the law, which states that a marriage of a girl under the age of 16 is prohibited, and between the ages of 16 and 21 is illegal without the approval and presence of her guardian.

Some Coptic activists maintain that government officials do not respond effectively to instances of alleged kidnapping. For example, the family of 18-year-old Ingy Helmy Labib alleged that in early January, she was abducted by Muslim extremists and forcibly converted to Islam. However, police in the town of Mahalla al-Kubra, in the Nile Delta police station north of Cairo, asserted that she left home and converted to Islam of her own volition. The family alleged that Labib suffered from mental illness and that her abductors exploited her condition. However, specific evidence of forced abduction was not available. In June, her family reported that she had returned home.

According to the law, persons above the age of 16 may convert to Islam without their parents' consent and even mental deficiency does not preclude a person's conversion. Police responses to such charges vary from case to case. In April 2003, police in Minya intervened in the case of Nivine Malak Kamel, a 17-year-old Christian girl allegedly kidnapped by Muslim Reda Hussan Abu Zeid, and in May 2003, the police returned her to her family.

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government took several steps to promote and improve religious freedom and tolerance. Following the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States and the increase in Israeli-Palestinian violence, government religious institutions such as Al-Azhar accelerated a schedule of interfaith discussions inside the country and abroad. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Tantawi and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda participated in joint public events.

In January, the Government announced the formation of the NCHR. The Government's appointments to the Council of prominent and credible figures were welcomed by a broad spectrum of observers. The Council's appointed president, Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali, is a Copt and is among the country's most respected public figures. In addition, 5 of the 25 members appointed to the Council are Coptic Christians. His deputy, Dr. Kamal Aboul Maged, is a prominent Islamic intellectual and a former Minister of Information. In May, the Council's cultural committee announced it would sponsor a training course for Muslim and Christian religious leaders on the subject of "religion and human rights."

The Anglican Church and al-Azhar University opened a formal dialogue in September 2001 in which participants agreed that peace was inseparable from justice. They also stated that "acceptance of the other" must be promoted, and they reaffirmed their commitment to joint action for peace, justice, and mutual respect. However, the third annual joint dialogue scheduled for September 2003 was postponed when delegates from al-Azhar declined to attend, reportedly at the request of the Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda III. Earlier in September, Pope Shenouda

publicly objected to the U.S. Anglican Church's evolving position on homosexual clergy.

A prominent Coptic nongovernmental organization (NGO) 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.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to take steps to contain incidents of sectarian tension. Independent observers believed the Government's relatively quick deployment of extra police during incidents of sectarian tension in Gerza, Giza Governorate, in October 2003 and in Samalout, Minya Governorate, in May successfully preempted escalations in violence.

In a number of cases reported in the media, government officials participated in consecration ceremonies for new churches. In March, Pope Shenouda and 31 bishops conducted a historic visit to several cities in Upper Egypt. During stops in Luxor and Sohag, the Pope consecrated several new churches. He was received with the highest level of protocol by governors and local government officials, who escorted him during stops on his itinerary.

Representatives of the country's very small and decreasing Jewish community reported good security measures and generally satisfactory cooperation with different agencies of the Government.

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 on satellite, broadcast weekly Orthodox Church services and other Christian programming. 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, especially designed for the country by the Children's Television Workshop, gained broad viewership among young children and many of their parents. Among the aims of the program is the promotion of tolerance, and one of the principal characters is a Christian.

Government and independent newspapers published a broad spectrum of news and views on religious topics, particularly following the terrorist attacks against the United States in September 2001. The government-run printing house Dar al-Ma'arif published a new edition of the four Christian gospels, resuming a practice that had stopped decades ago.

The Minister of Education has developed and distributed curricular materials instructing teachers in government schools to discuss and promote tolerance in teaching. Government schools began using a new curriculum on the Coptic and Byzantine periods of the country's history, developed with the advice and support of Christian intellectuals and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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, individual acts of prejudice occur, and members of both faiths practice discrimination.

In October 2003, Muslim residents in a village in the district of Gerza, southwest of Cairo, reportedly objected violently to the plans of Christian residents to convert a meeting site into a church. The ensuing violence resulted in property damage to a number of Christian-owned homes. In response the Government deployed extra security forces to the area until tensions subsided.

In May, Christian residents in Samalout, Minya, Upper Egypt, protesting the death of a priest and two other Christians in an auto accident while in police custody, were met by Muslim counter-demonstrators, and the two sides reportedly traded taunts and insults. Police reinforcements were temporarily deployed to prevent escalation.

In 2002, Muslim residents attacked and damaged a church in the village of Bani Walmiss. In 2003, the Government funded the repair of the church, and it officially reopened in June 2003.

In July 2000, gunmen killed Christian farmer Magdy Ayyad Mus'ad and wounded five other persons in Giza Governorate, allegedly because of objections to a church

Mus'ad built. Authorities charged a person with the killing but released the suspect on bail in October 2000; by the end of the period covered by this report, no trial date had been set and the case was pending.

In 2000, Father Hezkiyal Ghebriyal, a 75-year-old Coptic Orthodox priest, was stabbed and seriously wounded in the village of Bardis, near Sohag. Police arrested the suspected attacker within days of the incident. He was reported to be mentally ill and was subsequently released.

The case of Ahmad and Ibrahim Nasir, who were sentenced to 7 years in prison for the 1999 murder of a monk in Assiyut, remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. On May 25, 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. The brothers appealed, and their case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

While there is no legal requirement for a Christian girl or woman to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim (see Section II), conversion to Islam is sometimes used to circumvent the legal prohibition on marriage between the ages of 16 and 21 without the approval and presence of the girl's guardian. Most Christian families would object to a daughter's desire to marry a Muslim, and if a Christian woman marries a Muslim man, the Church excommunicates her. 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.

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 (see Section II). 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 the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (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.

According to media reports, Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Center reiterated fatwas issued in previous decades condemning Baha'is as apostates.

Anti-Semitic articles, which can be found in both the pro-government press and in the press of the opposition parties, increased late in 2000 and again in 2001 following the outbreak of violence in Israel and the occupied territories. There have been no violent anti-Semitic incidents in recent years directed at the tiny Jewish community still residing in the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The subject of religious freedom is an important part of the bilateral dialogue. The subject has been raised at all levels of the U.S. Government, including by the President, 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 also has made public statements supporting interfaith understanding and efforts toward harmony and equality among citizens of all faiths. During a February visit, officials from the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom met with minister-level and other government officials, religious leaders, and NGOs. Visiting congressional delegations also raised religious freedom issues during visits with government officials.

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. Officials from the Embassy and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) actively challenge anti-Semitic articles in the media through immediate contacts with editors-in-chief and other journalists.

In December 2003, Embassy officials consulted with the director of the Biblioteca Alexandrina, a prestigious international cultural and educational institution in Alexandria, regarding the library's inclusion in a display case of a copy of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a notorious anti-Semitic forgery. The director issued a statement noting that "bad judgment and insensitivity" had been exercised in the selection of the book in the display, and he stated that it had been removed.

The Mission, including the Department of State and USAID, works to expand human rights and to ameliorate the conditions that contribute to religious strife by promoting economic, social, and political development. U.S. programs and activities support initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom.

The Mission is working to strengthen civil society, supporting secular channels and the broadening of a civic culture that promote religious tolerance. An interagency small-grants program managed by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo supports projects that promote tolerance and mutual respect between members of different religious communities.

The Mission also promotes civic education. The Embassy supports the development of materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic-language and English-language curriculums. USAID, in collaboration with the Children's Television Workshop, 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. The program began broadcasting in August 2000; in 2002, household survey data showed that it was reaching more than 90 percent of elementary school-aged children (see Section II).

USAID supports private voluntary organizations that are implementing innovative curriculums in private schools. USAID 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 period covered by this report. Members of the country's religious minorities—including Sunni and Sufi Muslims, Baha'is, 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, through support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, as well as through 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.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 631,660 square miles, and its population is approximately 69 million. The population is approximately 99 percent Muslim, of which approximately 89 percent are Shi'a and 10 percent are Sunni, mostly Turkomen, 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.

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. 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 and Assyro-Chaldeans. There also are Protestant denominations, including 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 35,000 adherents. Zoroastrian groups, however, cite a larger figure of approximately 60,000. Zoroastrians mainly are ethnic Persians and are 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 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 the 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 as an independent religion with origins in the Shi'a Islamic tradition. Government officials have stated that, as individuals, all Bahai's 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 Government rules by a religious jurisconsult. The 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 elected by the Majlis.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance (Ershad) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security 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, one 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 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, can be punishable by death; however, there were no reported cases of the death penalty being applied for apostasy during the period covered by this report.

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. During the period covered by this report, for the first time Baha'i students were allowed to participate in the nationwide college entrance examination that determines who may attend state-run universities, although none actually had received admission to a university at the end of the period covered by this report. 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, official 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 for use. This approval requirement sometimes imposes significant translation expenses on minority communities.

The legal system also discriminates against religious minorities who receive lower awards than Muslims in injury and death lawsuits and incur heavier punishments. In 2002 the Sixth Majlis approved a bill that would make the amount of "blood money" (diyeh) paid by a perpetrator for killing or wounding a Christian, Jew, or Zoroastrian man the same as it would be for killing or wounding a Muslim; the bill ultimately was passed by the Guardian Council. 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 10 million (10 percent of the population) consisting mostly of Turkomen, 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. Sunni Muslims 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 ethnic minorities. Sunnis cite the lack of a Sunni mosque in Tehran, despite the presence of over 1 million Sunnis there, as a prominent example of this discrimination. Sunnis also have cited as proof of discrimination the lack of Sunni representation in appointed offices in provinces where Sunnis form a majority, such as Kurdistan province, as well as the reported inability of Sunnis to obtain senior governmental positions. Sunnis have also charged that the state broadcasting company Voice and Vision airs programming insulting to Sunnis.

In April Sunni Majlis representatives sent a letter to Supreme Leader Khamene'i decrying the lack of Sunni presence in the executive and judiciary branch 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 Mohammed, 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 demonstrates that government policy continued to aim for the eventual elimination of the Baha'is as a community. It 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 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 coreligionists 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 are more acute when Ba-

hai's are caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Baha'i headquarters.

Baha'is are banned from government employment. In addition Baha'is are regularly denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization.

The Government allows recognized religious minorities to establish community centers and certain cultural, social, athletic, or charitable associations that they finance themselves. 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 are not allowed to bury and honor their dead in keeping with their religious tradition. In 2002 the Government offered the Tehran Baha'i community a plot of land for use as a cemetery; however, the land was in the desert and had no access to water, making it impossible to perform Baha'i mourning rituals. In addition the Government stipulated that no markers be put on individual graves and that no mortuary facilities be built on the site, making it impossible to perform a ceremonial burial in the Baha'i tradition.

Baha'i group meetings and religious education, which often take place in private homes and offices, are curtailed severely. Public and private universities continue to deny admittance to Baha'i students.

Over the past several years, the Government has taken a few positive steps in recognizing the rights of Baha'is as well as of other religious minorities. For example, in recent years the Government has eased some restrictions, permitting Baha'is to obtain food-ration booklets and send their children to public elementary and secondary schools. In 1999 President Khatami publicly stated that persons should not be persecuted because of their religious beliefs. He vowed to defend the civil rights of all citizens, regardless of their beliefs or religion. Subsequently, the Expediency Council approved the "Right of Citizenship" bill, affirming the social and political rights of all citizens and their equality before the law. In 2000 the country began allowing couples to be registered as husband and wife without being required to state their religious affiliation. The measure effectively permits the registration of Baha'i marriages. Previously, Baha'i marriages were not recognized by the Government, leaving Baha'i women open to charges of prostitution. Children of Baha'i marriages had not been recognized as legitimate and therefore were denied inheritance rights.

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 period covered by this report many newspapers celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the publishing of the anti-Semitic "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.

In principle, but with some exceptions, there is little restriction of or interference with the 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 several Jewish schools remain open on Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath, in conformity with the schedule of other schools in the school system. Since working or attending school on the Sabbath violates Jewish law, this requirement has made it impossible for observant Jews both to attend school and adhere to a fundamental tenet of their religion.

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 Jewish persons 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 Mandaeans are regarded as Chris-

tians 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 experience 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 enforces gender segregation in most public spaces and prohibits women from interacting openly with unmarried men or men not related to them; 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. The law prohibits the publication of pictures of uncovered women in the print media, including pictures of foreign women. There are penalties, including flogging and monetary fines, for failure to observe norms of Islamic dress at work.

The law provides for segregation of the sexes in medical care. Only female physicians can treat women; however, women reportedly often receive inferior care because of the imbalance between the number of trained and licensed male and female physicians and specialists.

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.

All women, regardless of their age, must have the permission of their father or a living male relative to marry. The law allows for the practice of Siqeh, or temporary marriage, a Shi'a custom in which a woman or a girl may become the wife of a married or single Muslim male after a simple and brief religious ceremony. The woman has to consent to Siqeh, which is a civil contract between two parties, and each party stipulates the condition under which he or she enters into the agreement. The bond is not recorded on identification documents, and according to Islamic law, men may have as many Siqeh wives as they wish. Such wives usually are not granted rights associated with traditional marriage.

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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In February 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. On June 27, the house of the father of the faith's founder, Mirza Buzarg-e-Nuri, 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.

During the period covered by this report, one Baha'i was serving a prison sentence for practicing his faith. He was convicted of apostasy for being a Baha'i in 1996, but his death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by President Khatami in 1999. His property and assets reportedly were confiscated because his family members were Baha'is. In May 2003, a Baha'i prisoner was released following a visit by the U.N. Human Rights Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. In February two Baha'is held for practicing their faith were released after serving their full 15-year sentences.

The Government harasses the Baha'i community by arresting Baha'is arbitrarily, charging them, and then releasing them, often without dropping the charges against them. Those with charges still pending against them reportedly fear rearrest at any time.

According to Baha'i sources in the United States, since 2002 23 Baha'is from 18 different localities were arbitrarily arrested and detained for a short time because of their Baha'i faith. None of these persons was in prison at the end of the period covered by this report.

Government action against Baha'i education continued during the period covered by this report. The property rights of Bahai's 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. According to Baha'i sources, an Islamic Revolutionary Court rejected the appeal of a Baha'i to return his confiscated property on the grounds that he held Baha'i classes in his home and had a library of over 900 Baha'i books. 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 had 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.

It has become somewhat easier for Baha'is to obtain passports in the last 2 to 3 years. In addition some Iranian embassies abroad do not require applicants to state a religious affiliation. In such cases, it is easier for Baha'is to renew passports.

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. Worshippers 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 Iranian law and is punishable by the death penalty, although it is unclear that 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 at 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 there were reports of the arrest of evangelical Christians in the northern part of the country, including a Christian pastor and his family in Mazandaran Province. The pastor's family and two other church leaders who had been arrested earlier were reportedly released on May 30. Although the pastor reportedly was a convert from the Baha'i Faith, a number of those arrested in raids on house churches were

converts from Islam. The pastor and another Christian leader were released from custody in early July.

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 businesses in Tehran and Shiraz were targets of vandalism and boycotts, and Jewish persons reportedly have suffered personal harassment and intimidation. There were no reports of vandalism or similar harassment during the period covered by this report.

In 2002, the group Families of Iranian Jewish Prisoners (FIJP) published the names of 12 Jews who disappeared while attempting to escape from the country in the 1990s. The families continued to report anecdotal evidence that some of the men were in prisons. The Government never has provided any information regarding their whereabouts and claims that it has not charged any of them with crimes. FIJP believes that the Government has dealt with these cases differently than it has with other similar cases because the persons involved are Jewish. The families of the missing individuals reported that government officials claimed they lacked the authority to discover whether the missing individuals were being detained.

Numerous Sunni clerics have been killed in recent years, some allegedly by government agents. While the exact reason for their murders are 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 period covered by this report; 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 Zoroastrians were able to make, apparently without government interference, their annual pilgrimage to one of the holiest sites in 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. It has restricted the movement of several Shi'a religious leaders who have been under house arrest for years, including Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was released from 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.

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 Mohammed, based on a speech in which he challenged Muslims not to follow blindly 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, 2 of which were suspended, and 5 years of additional "deprivation of social right" (meaning that he cannot teach or write books or articles). His time served was counted towards his 3-year sentence, with the remainder of the time being converted by the court 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.

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 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.

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 perceived anti-Semitism on the part of the Government and within society.

The Government's anti-Israel policies and the trial of the 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," 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 period covered by this report. Sufis were also targeted by the Country's intelligence and security services.

In June 2003, an interfaith delegation of U.S. Christians, Jews, and Muslims traveled to the country to meet with religious, political, and cultural leaders.

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. has 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.

ISRAEL

Israel [1] 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 period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, there were problems with regard to equal treatment of religious minorities.

Relations among religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Muslims and Christians, 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 October 2000. At that time, Israeli police killed 12 Israeli-Arab demonstrators, prompting a 3-year public inquiry and investigation, the results of which were still a matter of official deliberation and public debate at the end of the period covered by this report. Tensions continued to remain high due to the 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 a total area of approximately 7,685 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.7 million (including Israeli settlers who live in the occupied territories). According to government figures, approximately 80 percent of the population is Jewish, although some 300,000 of these citizens do not qualify as Jews according to the Orthodox Jewish definition or that utilized by the Government in civil procedures. According to government figures, among the Jewish population, approximately 4.5 percent are Haredi, 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. 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.

Approximately 20 percent of the population is non-Jewish. Of this group, approximately 80 percent is Muslim, 10 percent Christian, and 10 percent Druze. The country's non-Jewish population is concentrated in the north of the country, in Bedouin communities in the Negev region in the south, and in a narrow band of Arab villages in the central part of the country adjacent to the occupied territories. There also are small numbers of evangelical Christians and members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The country's 250,000 guest workers are predominantly Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Buddhist.

The Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty describes the country as a "Jewish" and "democratic" state. Most of the non-Jewish minority are Muslims, Druze, and Christians, and they are generally free to practice their religions. Of this group, most are Arabs and are subject to various forms of discrimination, some of which have religious dimensions. Numerous religious groups are represented in the country.

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. Furthermore, the law explicitly guarantees freedom of religion and the safeguarding of "holy places of all religions." Israeli Arabs and other non-Jews generally are free to practice their religions; however, discrepancies exist in the treatment of various non-Jewish communities in society. Due to the "status quo" agreement reached at the founding of the state reflecting the influence of Orthodox Jewish political parties, the Government implements certain policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. For example, the Government does not recognize Jewish marriages performed in the country other than those performed by the Orthodox Jewish establishment.

[1] The religious freedom situation in the Occupied Territories is discussed in the annex appended to this report.

The Orthodox Jewish establishment determines who can be buried in Jewish state cemeteries and limits that right to those accepted as "Jewish" by orthodox definitions. In addition the national airline El Al and public buses in most cities do not operate on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, although some private bus companies operate on the Sabbath. According to the law, Jews in most professions may not work on the Sabbath. Additionally, streets in some Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods are closed to vehicles on the Sabbath. In April the High Court rejected a petition demanding that the Ministry of the Interior enforce the prohibition on the open sale of bread during the Passover holiday, but it did not rule on the legality of the prohibition. This prohibition does not apply to non-Jewish areas, where bread can be sold openly. In June 2003, the High Court suspended several municipal prohibitions and curbs on the sale of pork and issued guidelines suggesting that the sale of pork be allowed in neighborhoods where only a small portion of the residents would object on religious grounds. The result of the decision was to allow pork to be sold in those municipalities.

Israeli law recognizes the "religious communities" as carried over from those recognized under the British Mandate. These are: Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian-Catholic, Syrian (Catholic), Chaldean (Uniate), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Jewish. Three additional religious communities have subsequently been recognized—the Druze, the Evangelical Episcopal Church, and the Baha'i. The status of some 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 is a vestige of the Ottoman period, during which 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 period covered by this report.

Each recognized religious community has legal authority over its members in matters of marriage and divorce. For so-called "unrecognized religions," there were no local religious tribunals that had jurisdiction over their members in matters of personal status. In addition unrecognized religious communities would not receive government funding for their religious services, as many of the recognized communities do. Also, the Arrangements Law provides exemption from municipal taxes for any synagogue, church, mosque, or place of worship of a recognized faith. Finally, unrecognized religions have no religious tribunals with jurisdiction over their members in matters of personal status. Legislation enacted in 1961 afforded the Muslim courts exclusive jurisdiction to rule in matters of personal status concerning Muslims. Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but parties, by mutual agreement, may bring 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 only that child custody and child support be adjudicated in civil courts as an alternative to religious courts. Despite not having legal recognition, since 2001 Muslims also 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.

In March the Ministry of Religious Affairs was officially dismantled and its 300 employees reassigned to several other ministries. The Ministry was disbanded based on a compromise agreement with the Shinui party as part of its decision to join the Government. The Interior Ministry now has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups. The Prime Minister's office has jurisdiction over the nation's 137 religious councils, which oversee the provision of religious services. The Ministry of Tourism is now responsible for the protection and upkeep of all holy sites. The State continues to finance some 40 percent of the councils' budgets, and local authorities fund the remainder. However, an Arab advocacy group charged that, for the most part, the State did not allocate adequate or proportional funds for the provision of religious services in Arab towns and villages. According to the Government, however, funding for religious services in Arab communities has been proportional to the size of the community.

A reportedly small number of IDF soldiers killed in action since September 2000 were Muslim, Druze, and Israeli Arab Christians. After the family of one of the soldiers could not find a Muslim cleric to perform his burial, public debate ensued over the fact that the IDF does not employ a Muslim or a Christian chaplain. By the end of the period covered by this report, the IDF had not designated a Muslim or Christian cleric to serve as IDF chaplain. In 2003, an Israeli Christian soldier was killed in a terrorist attack. According to the soldier's family, 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 nonreligious ceremony without a religious figure to officiate. Muslim and Christian soldiers are allowed to take home leave for all religious holidays.

Under the Law of Return, the Government grants automatic citizenship and residence rights to Jewish immigrants and their families. Based on a 2000 decision made by the Attorney General, residency rights are not granted to relatives of converts to Judaism, except to 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. Until 2002 the Government designated "nationality" (i.e., Arab, Russian, or "Jew," etc.) on national identity documents. Groups representing persons who consider themselves Jewish, but who do not meet the Interior Ministry's criteria, have long sought either a change in the rules or removal of the nationality designation from identity cards, a move also supported by many Arab groups. In 2003, the Government began issuing new identification cards that do not carry a nationality designation to those seeking new or replacement national identity documents. However, citizens are still required to register as one of a set list of nationalities.

Under existing law, ultra-Orthodox Jews are entitled to exemption from military service to pursue religious or yeshiva studies. This exemption allows ultra-Orthodox Jews to postpone military service to pursue religious studies at a recognized yeshiva in 1-year intervals. Students must renew this postponement every year by proving that they are still full-time students. At the age of 22, these yeshiva students must determine within 1 year whether to continue to study full time with yearly renewals until they reach the age of 40, to serve for 1 year in community service and thereafter perform community service for 21 days each year, or to serve in the army until they finish their military service requirement. According to the Government, approximately 9 percent of male candidates for military service are exempted under the clause that allows them to declare they are full-time yeshiva students. In February, 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 IDF service to include yeshiva students and to integrate ultra-Orthodox Jews into the workforce. At the end of the period covered by this report, the committee had reached no conclusions and continued to discuss this issue.

The Government funds both religious and secular schools, including non-Jewish religious and secular schools. Some secular Jewish schools have adopted a religious education program developed by the non-Orthodox streams. According to Arab advocacy nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), schools in Arab areas, including Arab parochial schools, receive significantly fewer resources than comparable Jewish schools.

The Government recognizes the following Jewish holy days as national holidays: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shavuot, Simhat Torah, and Passover. Arab municipalities often recognize Christian and Muslim holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Orthodox Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious authorities have exclusive control over personal status matters, including marriage, divorce, and burial, within their respective communities. The law does not allow for civil marriage for any citizens, and it does not recognize Jewish marriage performed in the country unless performed by recognized Orthodox officials. Many Jewish citizens object to such exclusive control, and it has at times been a source of serious controversy in society.

The 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law protects holy sites of all religions within Israel, and the penal code makes it a criminal offense to damage any holy site. According to the Government, there were no claims or reports of damage to holy sites within Israel during the period covered by this report.

The Government permits religious organizations to apply for funding to maintain or build holy sites, and funding has been provided for the upkeep of holy sites such as mosques and cemeteries. Some civil rights NGOs assert that Orthodox Jewish holy sites receive significantly greater proportions of funding than do non-Orthodox Jewish and non-Jewish holy sites. Muslim groups complain that the Government has not equitably funded the construction and upkeep of mosques in comparison to the funding of synagogues, and that it has been reluctant to refurbish mosques in areas where there is no longer a Muslim population. Muslim residents of the Be'er Sheva area, including Bedouin tribes, have protested the municipality's intention to reopen the city's old mosque as a museum rather than as a mosque to service the area's Muslim residents. According to a media report, the High Court rejected a petition from representatives of the area's Muslim community to enjoin the munici-

pality from renovating the mosque into a museum. The High Court noted that the renovation would not harm the facility's design and would affect only the facade. The petitioners argued that there were no alternative mosques in the Be'er Sheva area.

Building codes for places of worship are enforced selectively based on religion. Some Bedouins living in unrecognized villages were denied building permits for construction of mosques. For example, in 2002 a local Bedouin began construction without a permit of a mosque in the village of Tal el-Malah in the southern part of the country to service the 1,500 residents who would otherwise need to travel more than 12 kilometers to the nearest mosque. In February 2003, the Government inspector warned the village that the building was illegal, and in May 2003 officials demolished the building. In contrast, according to a Tel Aviv municipal council member, there are approximately 100 illegal synagogues 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; however, there were no reports of the law's enforcement during the period covered by this report.

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.

Since 2000, the Government no longer requires Israeli Muslims to obtain permission from the Interior Ministry to travel to Saudi Arabia on the hajj. Since the country does not have diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Israeli Muslims must travel through another country, usually Jordan, to obtain travel documents for Saudi Arabia. The average number of pilgrims traveling from the country each year is approximately 4,500. According to the Government, travel to hostile countries may be restricted, including travel for the hajj; however, these restrictions are based on security concerns rather than on any religious or ethnic factors.

During the period covered by this report, many groups and individuals of numerous religions traveled to the country freely; there were no reports of persons being denied entry based on religious grounds.

During the period covered by this report, the Government refused to grant residence visas to some 130 Catholic clergy assigned by the Vatican to fulfill religious obligations in Israel and the occupied territories. According to church officials, this number represents a 60 percent increase over the previous year. The Interior Ministry appointed a task force to resolve the issue and explained in the media that the delay in issuing visas was mainly due to the examination by the Israel Security Agency of certain applications for security purposes, thus causing an application backlog. A church official also claimed that security forces harassed several clergy. Also, during the period covered by this report, a Greek Catholic pastor, Father Mamdouh Abu Sa'da, was prevented from driving his car for several months from his residence in the West Bank town of Beit Sahour to celebrate Mass in Jaffa, despite the fact that he had been driving in the country during the past 7 years.

In January the Government recognized the duly elected Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Eirinaios I, but this recognition was delayed until March, when the High Court rejected a legal challenge against the Government's decision. Eirinaios I was elected in 2001, but because of the lack of recognition by the Government, he had been unable to conclude financial or legal arrangements on behalf of the Patriarchate.

In 2002, the Israeli police confiscated the passport of Archimandrite Attallah Hanna, an Israeli citizen and a priest with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, for allegedly visiting Lebanon, a country considered hostile to Israel, without permission from the Interior Ministry and for making public statements hostile toward Israel while in that country. The case against Hanna was closed in January after Hanna signed a declaration renouncing terrorism; however, Hanna was told he needed to reapply for a new passport.

The Government discriminates against non-Jews, the vast majority of which are Arabs, 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 September 2003 noting historical, societal, and governmental discrimination against Arab citizens. In June the Government approved an interministerial committee's proposals, which included the creation of a government body to promote the Arab sector and a volunteer national civilian service program for Arab youth. These proposals were approved in attempt to address some of the Orr Commission's recommendations; however, Israeli-Arab advocacy organizations continued to criticize the Government for its failure after 4 years to indict any of the policemen involved in the 2000 events and its continued neglect of

other issues of importance to the Israeli-Arab community, such as the just distribution of resources.

In civic areas in which religion is a determining criterion, such as the religious courts and centers of education, non-Orthodox Jewish institutions routinely receive less state support than their Orthodox Jewish counterparts. Additionally, National Religious (i.e., modern Orthodox, one of the country's official Jewish school systems) and Christian parochial schools complain that they receive less funding than public secular schools despite the fact that they voluntarily abide by all national curricular standards. During the period covered by this report, the two groups together took their case for equal funding to the High Court. At the end of this period, there was no decision on the case.

Government funding to the different religious sectors is disproportionate to the sectors' sizes. Non-Orthodox streams of Judaism and the non-Jewish sectors receive proportionally less funding than the Orthodox Jewish sector. According to IRAC, the equivalent of less than 1 percent of public funding for Jewish cultural activities is provided to non-Orthodox or secular organizations, and over 99 percent of the funding goes to Orthodox Jewish organizations. IRAC reports that government funding has not gone into the construction of any non-Orthodox synagogues. In 2003 the Supreme Court ruled that state funds could be used for the construction of a reform synagogue in the city of Modi'in and referred the petition to the Modi'in municipality for action. IRAC reports that the city already has several Orthodox synagogues, but none that is conservative or reform.

Government resources available to non-Orthodox Jewish and Arab public schools are proportionately less than those available to Orthodox Jewish public schools. According IRAC, about 96 percent of state funds for religious education were allocated to Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools. Children attending public non-Orthodox Jewish schools do not receive instruction on Judaism, and the budget for teaching Islam or Christianity in the Arab public school system is disproportionately smaller. 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 receive significant government funding in addition to philanthropic contributions from within the country and abroad, which effectively lowers the schools' tuition costs. Non-Jewish Israelis are underrepresented in the student bodies and faculties of most universities and in the higher level professional and business ranks.

In 1998, the High Court of Justice ruled that the budget allocation to the non-Jewish sector constituted "prima facie" discrimination. In 2000, the same plaintiffs presented a case on the specific needs of religious communities regarding burials. The court agreed that non-Jewish cemeteries were receiving inadequate resources and ordered the Government to increase funding to such cemeteries. The Government began to implement this decision in 2001, although some groups complained that implementation was too slow. According to the Government, in 2003 approximately $1.7 million was allocated for Orthodox Jewish Cemeteries, compared with approximately $200,000 for civil cemeteries.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) owns approximately 8 percent of the country's land area and manages another 8 percent on behalf of the Government. The JNF's charter prohibits it from leasing land to non-Jews. The Jewish Agency, an organization that promotes Jewish immigration to the country and develops housing communities, 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 directly 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 applies to any third party that has such restrictions on the leasing or sale of land based on nationality, religion, or any other discriminatory means.

Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but by mutual agreement, parties may bring inheritance cases to religious courts. Jewish and Druze families may ask that some family status matters, such as alimony and child custody, 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 as an alternative to religious courts. Since 2001, Muslims have had the right to bring matters such as alimony and property division associated with divorce cases to civil courts in family status cases. However, paternity cases involving Muslims are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Muslim or Shari'a court.

Jewish citizens who wish to marry in secular or non-Orthodox religious ceremonies, citizens not officially recognized as Jewish by the Orthodox Jewish establishment, and those who wish to marry someone of another faith must do so abroad. The Ministry of Interior recognizes such marriages. According to media reports, an average of 5,000 couples travel abroad annually to be married in civil ceremonies,

mostly in Cyprus. Others hold weddings unrecognized by the Government, including Kibbutz, Reform, and Conservative weddings. In March a majority of the Knesset (parliament) voted against two bills that would have allowed for civil marriage.

The State also does not recognize conversions to Judaism performed in the country by non-Orthodox rabbis. The High Court allowed this practice to stand when it avoided ruling on this issue in May; however, the court ruled that non-Jews who move to the country and then convert in the country through an Orthodox conversion are eligible to become immigrants pursuant to the Law of Return. Previously, only persons who converted through an Orthodox conversion abroad were entitled to immigrate to the country based on that law.

Many Jewish citizens object to the exclusive authority of the Orthodox establishment over personal status issues for Jews, and it has been at times a source of serious controversy in society, particularly in recent years, because some 300,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union have not been recognized as Jewish by Orthodox authorities. Aside from the ability to marry, this affects whether an individual is entitled to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. The 1996 Alternative Burial Law established the individual right to be buried in an alternative, civil cemetery and called for establishment of these cemeteries throughout the country. However, at the end of the period covered by this report, only one public civil cemetery had been established in the country. Some domestic civil rights and immigrant groups assert that the Government has not allocated adequate space or sufficient funds for the development of alternative burial sites.

The Shinui Party, which ran on a platform of ending much of the Orthodox establishment's exclusive power, remained part of the governing coalition formed in early 2003 and retained control over the Ministries of Interior and Justice. Shinui leaders have stated that the party plans significant reforms to personal status and other questions handled by the ministries under its purview.

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 either have disappeared or refused to grant a divorce.

Rabbinical tribunals have the authority to impose sanctions on husbands who refuse to divorce their wives or on wives who refuse to accept a divorce from their husbands. At least one man, a U.S. citizen, had been in jail for over 2 years because he refused to grant his wife a writ of divorce. He was released approximately 1 year ago. In some cases, rabbinical courts have failed to invoke sanctions. In May, 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 persons 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.

Members of unrecognized religious groups (particularly evangelical Christians) sometimes also face the same problems obtaining marriage certificates or burial services as do citizens not considered Jewish by the Orthodox establishment. However, informal arrangements with other recognized religious groups provide relief in some cases.

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. According to IRAC, the Government has yet to finish renovating that area to allow these women to hold prayers there. Most Orthodox Jews believe that mixed gender prayer services violate the precepts of Judaism, and Jews still are unable to hold mixed gender prayer services at the Western Wall. Women also are not allowed to conduct any formal or informal prayer at the Western Wall wearing prayer shawls, which are typically worn by men, and cannot read from Torah scrolls.

In December 2003, IRAC petitioned the Supreme Court to overturn the government practice whereby the Adoption Service of the Ministry of Social Affairs places Israeli non-Jewish children only in Orthodox Jewish homes. Pursuant to law, the adopted child must be of the same religion as the adopting parents. Since conversions to non-Orthodox forms of Judaism are not recognized in the country, the Government argued that by placing these children with Orthodox parents, the children would not face any limbo periods during which their conversions could be questioned.

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 Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, committed acts of terror against Israelis during the period covered by this report. These attacks included an August 2003 attack by Hamas that killed 23 persons and injured over 130, an October 2003 attack by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad that killed 21 persons and injured 60, and a March attack by Hamas and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade that killed 10 persons and injured 16. These groups also issued anti-Semitic statements following these attacks.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among different religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Christians and Muslims, 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 are compounded by governmental and societal discrimination against Israeli-Arabs. These tensions have been heightened by the Arab-Israeli conflict, manifested by terrorist attacks mostly against Israeli Jews, 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 University of Haifa survey released in June, approximately 64 percent of the Jewish public believes the Government should encourage Israeli Arabs to emigrate from the country, with 55 percent believing that Israeli Arabs present a threat to national security. Similar surveys also have revealed a continuing increase in distrust between Israeli Jews and Arabs.

A number of NGOs exist that are dedicated to promoting Jewish-Arab coexistence in the country. Their programs include events to increase Jewish-Arab dialogue and cooperation. These groups and events have had varying degrees of success. Interfaith dialogue often is linked to the peace process between the country and its Arab neighbors. In January Canon Andrew White, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Special Representative to the Alexandria Peace Process, convened approximately 30 high-level Palestinian religious leaders and Israeli religious representatives in Cairo to discuss advancing the Alexandria Interfaith Peace Process, which was initiated in 2002 at an interfaith summit in Egypt.

Animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the period covered by this report. Non-Orthodox Jews have complained of discrimination and intolerance on the part of members of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups. Persons who consider themselves Jewish but who are not considered Jewish under Orthodox law particularly complained of discrimination. During the period covered by this report, there were reported incidents in Jerusalem in which ultra-Orthodox Jews threw rocks at passing motorists to protest that they were driving on the Sabbath.

Numerous NGOs exist that seek to build understanding and create dialogue between religious groups and between religious and secular Jewish communities. These NGOs include the Gesher Foundation (Hebrew for "bridge"); Meitarim, which operates a pluralistic Jewish-oriented school system; and the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, which promotes interfaith dialogue with 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. Christian and Muslim Israeli-Arab religious leaders complain that missionary activity that leads to conversions frequently disrupts family coherence in their communities.

During the period covered by this report, mainstream newspapers periodically criticized the country's ultra-Orthodox or "Haredi" community for yeshiva students' exemption from military service and the Government's provision of living allowances to these students in lieu of their working. In February, 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 period covered by this report, the committee was working on a compromise measure to address this issue.

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. In meetings with government officials, the Embassy and U.S. State Department officials in Washington continued to raise concern about the denial of some U.S. citizens' entry into the country based on ethnic and religious background.

Embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, routinely meet with religious officials. These contacts include meetings with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Druze, and Baha'i leaders at a variety of levels. In August 2003, Embassy officials met with a group of Knesset members from the secular Shinui party to discuss issues of concern to more-secular Israelis, including the issue of Orthodox Jewish religious control over marriages and burials.

In November 2003, the Embassy hosted an Iftaar dinner to commemorate the Muslim holiday of Ramadan, inviting over 80 Israeli Muslim representatives from the political, economic, legal, religious, and business communities, and also 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 in the country.

In March the Ambassador met with Lord Carey of Clifton, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, who played a vital role in the Alexandria Declaration of 2002 and the "Alexandria Process" that has followed. Lord Carey, accompanied by a representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury and a senior delegation of Christian leaders from the United States, discussed with Embassy officials and Israeli, Palestinian, and international figures ways to promote the implementation of the commitments senior Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders had made in Alexandria to reduce violence, teach tolerance in religious educational settings, and promote interfaith dialogue in support of the peace process.

Embassy officials maintain a dialogue with NGOs that follow human and civil rights issues, including religious freedom. These NGOs include 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, Adalah, and others. In April the Embassy met with the director of the Arab Association for Human Rights to discuss issues of concern to the Israeli-Arab community, including societal tensions between Arabs and Jews in the country.

Embassy representatives attended and spoke at meetings of groups seeking to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance and also met with Israeli-Arab organizations, including Adalah and the Islamic Movement-Northern Branch, to discuss religious freedom issues. The Embassy provided small grants to local organizations promoting interfaith dialogue and coexistence and to organizations examining the role of religion in resolving conflict.

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 deterioration in the status of the PA's respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The PA failed to halt several cases of seizures of Christian-owned land in the Bethlehem area by criminal gangs. There were credible reports that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with members of these gangs to extort property illegally from Christian landowners. Several cases of physical attacks against Christians in Bethlehem also went unaddressed by the PA, while attacks against Muslims in the same area were investigated.

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 deterioration in the status of the Israeli Government's respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Israel's strict closure policies frequently restricted the ability of Palestinians to reach places of worship and practice their religions. Israel failed to grant new visas or extensions of old visas to hundreds of Christian clergy, seriously impeding the functioning of their congregations

in the occupied territories. The Israeli Government seized land 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. 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 continued to remain high during the period covered by this report. 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 1.4 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 2.3 million persons, not including approximately 190,000 Israeli settlers. East Jerusalem covers an area of 27 square miles, and its population is approximately 390,000 persons, including approximately 180,000 Israeli settlers. The Golan Heights covers an area of 1,295 square kilometers, 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, 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, Syriacs, 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 2,400 Christians from the Bethlehem area have left the occupied territories for other countries. According to Christian leaders, most of the Christians left their homes for economic and security reasons and not due to religious discrimination. There is also a community of approximately 550 Samaritans (an ancient offshoot of Judaism) located on Mount Gerazim near Nablus in the West Bank.

Several 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 PA has not adopted legislation regarding religious freedom; however, both the Basic Law and the draft constitution address religion. 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 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 would 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 oper-

ate, are not recognized officially by the PA; and a small number of churches that became active within the last decade, 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 nonrecognized 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.

The PA does not officially sponsor interfaith dialogue; however, it 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 harassment and intimidation of Christian residents of Bethlehem by the city's Muslim majority. In some cases, PA officials appear to have been complicit in property extortion of Palestinian Christian residents. Within the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there is a department responsible for Christian affairs, and PA Chairman Yasir Arafat has an advisor 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 Prophet Muhammad's birthday. 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 and East Jerusalem when granting permits for home building and civic services. For example, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem pay the same taxes as Jewish residents; however, 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 admitted to and followed since 1967. 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

Since the start of the Intifada, officials in the Jerusalem Waqf have prohibited non-Muslims from entering the sanctuary of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, the third holiest shrine in Islam and the holiest site in Judaism. Waqf officials have claimed that this is a temporary closure implemented because Waqf officials cannot justify allowing non-Muslims to visit the Haram al-Sharif at a time when Palestinian Muslims from the occupied territories are prevented from visiting and worshiping there. Palestinians generally have been unable to reach the Haram al-Sharif due to travel restrictions against entry into Jerusalem. Restrictions at times are placed on entry into the Haram al-Sharif itself even for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, such as the restriction of males under the age of 45.

The Israeli police previously cooperated with the Waqf in keeping the Haram al-Sharif closed to non-Muslims; however, in June 2003, Israeli police officers began escorting groups of Christian and Jewish tourists into the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount for visiting but not worshipping, against the wishes of the Waqf authorities. Israeli police spokesmen indicated that the visits were an effort by the Government of Israel to re-assert the right of non-Muslims to visit the shrine. Waqf officials assert that these visits are a breach of the religious status quo, which grants the Waqf custodianship over the Haram al-Sharif. While visits continue, police escorts generally are no longer needed since the Waqf has acquiesced to these visits. During the period covered by this report, Waqf officials claimed that the police effectively did not prevent nationalistic Jewish groups from entering the Haram al-Sharif to conduct religious or political activities.

The Israeli Government annexed East Jerusalem in 1967 and applied Israeli law to the area; therefore, Israeli law and legal structures govern East Jerusalem. The Israeli High Court of Justice ruled that a small number of Jews under police escort were to be allowed to pray at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. 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 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 worship at the site. Spokesmen for these groups have confirmed successful attempts to pray inside the compound in interviews with the Israeli media.

In 2003, Israeli police detained four guards employed by the Waqf on charges that they harassed Jewish visitors to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and banned the four from returning to the compound for 2 months. Waqf officials insist the guards were detained in retaliation for protesting cases of Jewish visitors praying at the site.

In 2002, Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian officials arranged to repair a bulge that appeared in the southern wall of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. After disagreements between Israeli and Waqf officials over the cause of the bulge halted repair work for several months, Jordanian engineers visited the site in November 2002 to examine the damage and began work in 2003 to repair it. At the end of the period covered by this report, the work had not been completed.

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, formerly under Jordanian rule, Shari'a-based law pertaining to women is part of the Jordanian Status Law of 1976. 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, in the event of divorce, would govern financial and child custody matters. 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, 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. Such restrictions significantly impeded freedom of access to places of worship for Muslims and Christians, and these restrictions remained in place at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2002, the Government of Israel, citing security concerns, began constructing a barrier in the occupied territories to separate the West Bank from Israel and East Jerusalem. 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 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 both Palestinian Christians and foreign pilgrims. 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 that surrounds Rachel's Tomb (a shrine holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims) that would place the shrine on the Israeli side of the separation barrier. Jewish tourists visiting the shrine occasionally have been harassed by Palestinians, but some Muslims and Christians claimed that confiscating land around the shrine in response impedes their access to the site and unjustly harms the landowners in question. During the period covered by this report, the land was seized but the Government of Israel had yet to build the separation barrier in this area. Settlers have obtained ownership of the land and properties through a disputed land deal. At the end of the period covered by this report, there was an impending court case regarding the legal status of this land.

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. At the end of the period covered by this report, the parties had not reached an agreement on compensation for damage done to the property by the IDF during incursions into Bethlehem in 2002.

During the period covered by this report, the Israeli Government confiscated land 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. At the end of the period covered by this report, work on the barrier in this area was almost finished. In the village of Bethpage on the Mount of Olives, the Israeli Government continued building an 8-meter high concrete separation barrier section next to the walls of several Christian institutions. Local religious leaders argued that the barrier in Bethpage would prevent them from holding the annual Palm Sunday procession from Bethany to the Old City of Jerusalem in the future.

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. On numerous occasions, including nearly the entire month of April, the Israeli Government also prevented worshippers under the age of 45 from attending Friday prayers inside the Haram al-Sharif. The Israeli Government stated that it did so to prevent outbreaks of violence following Friday prayers. In September 2003, February, and April, Israeli police clashed with Muslim worshippers at the Haram al-Sharif. On each occasion, Israeli police said Palestinian worshippers threw stones at Jewish worshippers at the nearby Western Wall. Waqf officials countered that Israeli troops entered the compound before the prayer times ended, violating the sanctity of the site and provoking the clashes. Reportedly, during the April clashes approximately 70 Palestinian worshippers suffered tear gas inhalation and injuries from rubber-coated bullets, and several Israeli policemen were struck by stones. Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall below also were prevented on a few occasions from praying due to stone throwers.

The Israeli Government's closure policy prevented several Palestinian religious leaders (both Muslim and Christian) from reaching their congregations. In 2001 the Israeli Government pledged to create a "hotline" to facilitate the movement of clerics through checkpoints; however, it had not done so by the end of the period covered by this report. In previous years, several clergymen reported that they were subject to harassment at checkpoints.

In January the Israeli Government recognized the duly elected Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Eirinaios I, but this recognition was delayed until March, when the Israeli High Court rejected a legal challenge against the Government's decision. Eirinaios I was elected in August 2001, and because of the lack of recognition by the Israeli Government, until recently he was unable to conclude financial or legal arrangements on behalf of the Patriarchate.

In 2002, the Israeli police confiscated the passport of Archimandrite Attallah Hanna, an Israeli citizen and a priest with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, for allegedly visiting Lebanon, a country considered hostile to Israel, without permission from the Interior Ministry, and for making public statements hostile toward Israel while in that country. The case against Hanna was closed in January after Hanna signed a declaration renouncing terrorism; however, Hanna was told he needed to reapply for a new passport.

During the period covered by this report, Palestinian violence against Israeli settlers prevented some settlers from reaching Jewish holy sites in the occupied territories. Since early 2001, following the outbreak of the Intifada, the Israeli Government 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 Joseph's Tomb in Nablus and an ancient synagogue in Jericho. Some Israelis were unable to reach Jewish sites in the occupied territories such as Rachel's Tomb and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron due to the ongoing violence, including on religious holidays.

Settler violence against Palestinians prevented some Palestinians from reaching holy sites in the occupied territories. According to press reports, for 3 weeks in 2002, settlers in Hebron forcibly prevented Muslim muezzins from reaching the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs to sound the call to prayer. According to PA officials in Hebron, the blocking of muezzins as well as more generally preventing access to Muslim religious sites continued to be a large problem. The Government of Israel did not effectively respond to settler-initiated blocking of religious sites.

Palestinians generally are not allowed to enter Ben-Gurion airport to travel to Egypt or Jordan, and there are no direct air links from Israel to Saudi Arabia. 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. While there are no specific restrictions placed on Palestinians from making the hajj, all Palestinians face closures and long waits at Israeli border crossings, which often impede religious movement.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government of Israel failed to grant new visas to or renew existing visas for more than 100 Christian clergy ministering in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. At least 138 requests for visas or extensions for Catholic priests were outstanding with the Israeli Government at the end of the period covered by this report, more than double the total at the same time last year. Catholic officials claimed a majority of the requests were filed before October 2003, with many requests outstanding since June 2003. Certain Orthodox congregations reported that most of their priests and religious workers were out of status because of long delays in processing visa extensions. The Israeli Government claimed that these delays were due to security processing for visas and extensions.

Catholic, Orthodox, and evangelical Christian leaders allege that the Government of Israel's refusal to issue new visas or extensions for religious workers in a timely fashion threatened the future of their congregations in the Holy Land. Catholic religious leaders have argued publicly that the visa problems are part of a strategy by the Israeli Government to reduce the presence of Palestinian Christians in the occupied territories outside East Jerusalem. They reported that visas for priests to work in the West Bank were almost impossible to obtain, while priests posted to East Jerusalem encountered less difficulty. According to Church leaders, the visa problem had worsened significantly over the past year. They reported some improvement toward the end of the period covered by this report, but the problem remains unresolved.

In April, Israeli soldiers prevented a high-level Catholic delegation from proceeding to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem along the main road adjoining Rachel's Tomb. Local Catholic representatives and PA officials condemned the act as a violation of the religious status quo.

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 period covered by this report, neither the Defense ministry nor the Antiquities Authority had repaired the site.

In 2002, Israeli forces deliberately mistreated or accidentally injured several Christian religious leaders and lay members. In April 2002, patriarchs of several major Christian denominations in Jerusalem claimed that the IDF forcibly entered numerous churches in Bethlehem and Ramallah and mistreated clergymen. The Syrian Orthodox Archbishop claimed that an IDF unit entered a Syrian Orthodox Church in Bethlehem, damaged property, and threatened a 70-year-old priest with a gun. At the end of the period covered by this report, the IDF had not taken disciplinary action against any of its soldiers suspected of mistreating religious figures.

On June 13, 2003, the day that Muslims celebrated the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, 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, 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. At the end of the period covered by this report, the order was still in effect.

Although it is difficult to assess culpability in the destruction of and damage to many places of worship in the occupied territories, their destruction or damage affects the practice of religion and religious freedom. Among the sites damaged in 2002 were 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. 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. In previous years, there were credible reports that the Israeli military caused significant damage to Palestinian 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 as of June they had not received a response. At the end of the period covered by this report, 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 occurred during combat operations.

In 2002, gun and tank fire damaged the Holy Family Hospital, the Lutheran Christmas Church, and the Dar al-Kalima Academy in Bethlehem. Such damage was extensive in some cases and included destruction of church and school property, including religious symbols. The institutions filed claims for restitution with the Israeli Government. The Israeli Government did not repair or pay to repair any of the places of worship that the IDF damaged while operating in the occupied territories, and it denied requests for compensation that submitted in this regard. The Israeli Government claims that it is not responsible for damages incurred during a state of war.

Armed action by Palestinian gunmen and members of the Palestinian security services against Israeli forces damaged some religious buildings. During a 2002 armed standoff between Israeli forces and a group of approximately 160 Palestinian gunmen, including PA security forces, the Church of the Nativity, the Latin (Roman Catholic) section of the Nativity compound, and the Greek Orthodox and Armenian monasteries sustained considerable material damage. At the end of this reporting period, work continued to repair the damage to the church.

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

used forged land documents to assert ownership of lands belonging to Christians. Police refused 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 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 period covered by this report, no action had been taken.

Several cases of physical attacks against Christians in Bethlehem also went unaddressed by the PA, while attacks against Muslims in the same area were investigated. In December 2003, one prominent Christian landowner was beaten severely by masked men. No suspects had been arrested by the end of the period covered by this report. Another Bethlehem-area Christian resident was shot and seriously injured in 2003 after he insisted that the death of his relative be investigated by the police rather than resolved through payment of compensation. No arrests have been made in the 2 years since the man was shot.

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 period covered by this report, the Palestinian terrorist groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad carried out several terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians. In August 2003, 23 persons were killed and over 130 injured in a suicide bombing aboard a bus in Jerusalem. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack. In October 2003, Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in a Haifa restaurant that killed 20 persons and injured more than 60. While these attacks were usually carried out in the name of Palestinian nationalism, some of the rhetoric used by these organizations has also reportedly included expressions of anti-Semitism.

A small number of Kach-affiliated Jewish settlers 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 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.

There were some reports of Christian-Muslim tension in the occupied territories. Imams at mosques in Bethlehem have repeatedly called for violence against all Christians and Jews during their Friday sermons. These sermons often equate Christians with crusaders and with foreign countries whose interests are perceived to be contrary to the Palestinian cause. In addition there have been periodic accusations that Muslim militants open fire on the Israeli neighborhood of Gilo from Christian areas in Beit Jala to draw IDF fire onto Christian homes. 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 mem-

bers and community leaders for marrying Muslim men during the period covered by this report.

In general evangelical churches have not been welcomed by the more established Christian denominations.

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, there were some reports of settler violence against Palestinian religious establishments. According to press reports, in October 2002, Israeli settlers in Hebron broke into the offices of the Waqf in Hebron and destroyed furniture and allegedly burned deeds to all of the Waqf's property in the city. During the period covered by this report, there were no reported cases of settler violence against religious property.

Also in October 2002, two men who appeared to be Orthodox Jews vandalized a neon crucifix on the roof of Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Jerusalem. At the end of the period covered by this report, there had been no arrests.

During the period covered by this report, Muslims on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif on at least three separate occasions threw stones over a high wall onto the Western Wall plaza where Jews were praying.

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-Arab statements. Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Ze'ev Boim asked in February, "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 de-legitimize Jewish history in general. Israeli settler radio stations often depicted Arabs as subhuman and called for Palestinians to be expelled from the West Bank.

There were instances of ultra-Orthodox Jews harassing Muslims. On several occasions, a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews 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 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 the 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 period covered by this report, 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 repeatedly with PA officials.

In several cases, the U.S. Embassy intervened with the Israeli Government to mitigate the damage caused by the separation barrier to Christian places of worship. The Israeli Government agreed to consider changes to the route of the barrier

in Jerusalem near several Christian institutions and install pedestrian gates in the barrier to facilitate the passage of priests and other religious workers. Two of these route changes were formalized by the end of the period covered by this report.

JORDAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that religious practices are consistent with "public order and morality"; however, the Government continued to impose some restrictions on freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Members of unrecognized religious groups and religious converts from Islam face legal discrimination and bureaucratic difficulties in personal status cases. The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Relations between Muslims and Christians in the country generally are amicable; however, adherents of unrecognized religions face some 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 a total area of 55,436 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.4 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 Missionary Alliance, are registered with the Ministry of Justice 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 Muslim 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, have significant Christian populations. The northern part of the city of Azraq has a significant 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 of Druze 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 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Campus Crusaders for Christ, Life Agape, Intervarsity, Navigators, Christar, Arab World Ministries, Operation Mobilization, Southern Baptist International Mission Board, the Conservative Baptist, 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 Orione 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, provided that religious practices are consistent with "public order and morality"; however, the Government continued to impose some restrictions on freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion.

While Christianity is recognized as a 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 bishops representing officially registered local churches on all matters relating to the Christian community, including the registration of new churches in the country. The Government uses the following criteria when considering official recognition of Christian churches: the faith does not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the faith is recognized by the Middle East Council of Churches; the faith does not oppose the national religion; and the group includes some citizen followers.

The role of the State in religious affairs is limited to supervision. Groups that have practices that violate the law and the nature of society are prohibited; however, in practice there were no reports that religious groups were banned.

Churches and other religious institutions that wish to receive official government recognition, must apply to the Prime Ministry for registration. Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent from 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 students are allowed religious instruction 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. 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 provision 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 Interfaith Studies and the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research (al-Bayt Foundation). Both institutions sponsor research, international conferences, and discussions on a wide range of religious, social, and historical questions from the perspective of both Muslims and Christians. The Government held an international Christian conference in government facilities in 2001.

The Muslim feasts of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday, 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 holiday and Christians may request leave for other Christian feasts prescribed 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, complained of societal and official discrimination. In addition not all Christian denominations have applied for or been accorded legal recognition as religions.

The Government does not recognize the Druze or Baha'i faiths as religions but does not prohibit the practice of these faiths. 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 issued to adherents of these faiths; 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.

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. Although the majority of Christians are allowed to practice freely, some activities are prohibited, such as encouraging Muslims to convert to Christianity, considered legally incompatible with Islam.

Shari'a law prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. Conversion to the Muslim faith by Christians is allowed; however, a Muslim may not convert to another religion. The small number of Muslims who convert to other faiths claim societal and government discrimination. The Government does not fully recognize the legality of such conversions. Under Shari'a, converts are regarded as apostates and legally may be denied their property and other rights; however, in practice this principle is not applied. 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 and are considered Muslims under Shari'a. Converts to Islam remain under the jurisdiction of the Shari'a courts. Shari'a law prescribes the death penalty for Muslims who convert to another religion; however, there is no corresponding statute under national law, and such punishment never has been applied.

The Government generally does not prohibit citizens from proselytizing if their activities are within the limits of the law, maintain the proselytizers' personal security and safety, and do not contradict local standards. Government policy requires specifically that foreign missionary groups (which the Government believes are not familiar with the customs and traditions of the indigenous society) refrain from public proselytizing to maintain the missionaries' safety and security from members of society opposed to such practices. In the past, the Government has taken action against some Christian proselytizers in response to the complaints of recognized Christian groups who charged that the missionaries' activities disrupted the peace and cohesion of society.

During the period covered by the previous report, members of the local evangelical community reported increased attention from the Government. In 2002, a foreign pastor and his wife claimed that a border official at the airport threatened to cancel their residency permits. The pastor claimed that the action was in response to his refusal to verify whether or not Muslims attend his church's services. He and his wife left the country voluntarily and have not returned. Also in 2002, two members of the evangelical community complained that lower level government officials threatened to cancel their residency permits for activities that allegedly were inappropriate. When the Government became aware of this at higher levels, it dropped the matter. The two evangelicals remained in the country and have reported no subsequent problems.

Noncitizen Christian missionaries operate in the country but are subject to restrictions. During the period covered by this report, Christian mission groups in the country complained of difficulty in dealing with local interchurch politics. In addition, some also complained of delays in obtaining residence permits.

Despite previous difficulties with its legal status, the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), a Christian training school for pastors and missionaries, was registered with the Government and operating as a cultural center. Students and faculty from the U.S. and elsewhere wishing to attend JETS were able to obtain residency in the country through tourist visas. The Government authorized JETS to own property, and in August 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. In 2001, the King dissolved Parliament and charged the Government with drafting a new election law. The country's parliamentary election law historically has limited the number of Islamists elected to Parliament. The Islamic Action Front, the country's major Islamic party, participated in the June 2003 parliamentary elections, winning 18 of the 110 seats.

The Political Parties Law prohibits houses of worship from being used for political activity. The law was designed primarily to deny government opponents the ability to preach 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 published. In July 2000, Hawamdeh, without retracting any portion of his poem, was acquitted on all charges in both the Shari'a and civil courts. Because of technicalities, the Shari'a court subpoenaed Hawamdeh again in 2001 for the 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 de-

nied "undeniable facts from the Holy Koran." Hawamdeh immediately challenged the verdict, and in August 2003 the Appeals Court upheld the verdict. At the end of the period covered by this report, 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 loosely monitors sermons at mosques and requires that speakers refrain from criticizing the royal family or instigating 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 Muhammad'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 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 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. The minor children of a male Muslim who converts to Christianity continue to be treated as Muslims under the law.

In 1998, legal custody of two children of a Christian widow living in Irbid was granted, against her will, to her Muslim brother. A civil court held that Shari'a law revoked the mother's custody of the children because she had failed to raise them as Muslims. The children had been raised as Christians because both their mother and father originally were Christian. Their father allegedly converted to Islam shortly before his death. As a result of this alleged conversion, the children were considered to be Muslim as a matter of Shari'a law; however, the mother lawfully remained Christian. The civil court rejected the mother's final appeal in February 2002. The court's final judgment had yet to be enforced by the end of the period covered by this report, and the children continued to live with their mother and attend a local school.

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 the Muslim faith to divorce legally.

The Government notes individuals' religions (except for Druze, Baha'is, and other unrecognized religions) on the national identity card and "family book" (a national registration record that is issued to the head of every family and that serves as proof of citizenship) of all citizens. 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 for certain occasions. There is no Christian clergy in the military.

During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, all citizens, including non-Muslims, are discouraged from eating, drinking, or smoking in public or in vehicles, and they also are discouraged strongly from dressing in a manner that is considered inconsistent with Islamic standards. Restaurants are closed during daylight hours unless

specifically exempted by the Government. Only those facilities catering specifically to tourists are allowed to remain open during the daytime and sell alcohol during the month of Ramadan.

Under Shari'a as applied in the country, a female heir receives half the amount of a male heir's inheritance, and non-Muslim widows of Muslim spouses have no inheritance rights. A sole female heir receives half of her parents' estate; the balance goes to designated male relatives. A sole male heir inherits both of his parents' property. Male Muslim heirs have the duty to provide for all family members who need assistance. Men are able to divorce their spouses more easily than women are, although a provisional law passed in 2001 allows women to divorce their husbands in Shari'a court. Since the law went into effect, Shari'a courts have granted several hundred divorces brought by women. The new lower house of Parliament rejected the law in August 2003, but the upper house approved it. It remains in effect until parliament takes final action.

According to government legal officials, civil, criminal, and commercial courts accord equal weight to the testimony of men and women. However, in Shari'a court, the testimony of two women is equal to that of a man's in most circumstances.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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 2001 the security services detained approximately 50 persons, described in the press as Islamists. Such detentions were related to allegations of involvement in terrorist or 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 a child may restrict the child's travel. There are at least 10 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 Muslim if their fathers are Muslim.

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 Muslims and Christians in the country generally are amicable. Relations within the Christian community sometimes are difficult, especially within the evangelical Christian community. There are disputes between and within different Christian denominations.

In general Christians do not suffer discrimination. Christians hold high-level government and private sector positions and are represented in the media and academia approximately in proportion to their presence in the general population. Senior command positions in the military traditionally have been reserved for Muslims (see Section II). Baha'is face some societal and official discrimination. Employment applications occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion.

The majority of the indigenous population views religion as central to one's personal identity, and religious conversions are not tolerated widely. Muslims who convert to other religions often face social ostracism, threats, and abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. Such relationships, which ultimately may lead to conversion (either to the Muslim or Christian faiths), usually are strongly discouraged by the families. Interfaith 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. 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, there were some cases of mixed-faith married couples seeking to emigrate to other countries because of the negative family and societal reactions to their marriages.

In the fall of 2003, a number of Muslims and Christians founded the Jordan Interfaith Coexistence Research Center, which has been increasingly active in promoting interfaith dialogue both domestically and internationally. During the period covered

by this report, local newspapers occasionally published articles critical of evangelical organizations.

In 2002, a member of the royal family (Prince Hassan) hosted in Amman an international, interfaith conference on "Rejecting Violence and Promoting Peace with Justice." The conference focused on interfaith dialogue among the religious communities of Iraq, but it included religious leaders and scholars from numerous countries.

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. 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. An Embassy officer was in regular contact with members of the U.S. missionary community in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy sent 12 Shari'a law students to the U.S. on an International Visitor program in which they met with Christian and Jewish opinion leaders. Several Shari'a law students were also studying English at the Embassy's American Learning Center. The Embassy organized a Voluntary Visitor program in the U.S. for four members of a local interfaith coexistence group. The visit focused on religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue, initiating ongoing contacts with numerous American religious groups. In the past, Embassy officers assisted private religious groups to obtain official registration.

KUWAIT

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the State protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals. The Constitution states 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 period covered by this report. The Government approved some long-standing Shi'a requests for reform, including the establishment of an independent Shi'a waqf (endowment) and Shi'a court of cassation (Supreme Court) to handle Shi'a personal status and family law cases. The Prime Minister met separately with the various religious groups and political groups in the country to combat religious extremism and promote religious tolerance. 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 a total area of 6,880 square miles, and its population is 2.5 million. Of the country's total population, approximately 1.6 million are Muslim, including the vast majority of its approximately 913,000 citizens. The remainder of the total population consists of approximately 1.5 million foreign workers and tens of thousands of 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 Sunni and Shi'a adherents, the majority of citizens, including the ruling family, belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The total Sunni Muslim population is well over 1 million, approximately 600,000 of whom are citizens. The remaining 30 to 35 percent of Muslim citizens (approximately 300,000 to 350,000) are Shi'a, as are approximately 100,000 noncitizen residents. Estimates of the nominal Christian population range from 250,000 to 500,000 (including approximately 200 citizens, most of whom belong to 12 large families).

The Christian community includes the Roman Catholic Church, with 2 official churches and a third worship facility in a rented house in which religious services are held, and an estimated 100,000 members (Latin, Maronite, Coptic Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Malabar, and Malankara congregations all worship at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait City); the Greek Catholic Church, with approximately 2,000

members (Greek Catholics worship in a rented house, not at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait City); the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church, with approximately 115 members (several thousand other Christians also use the Anglican Church for worship services); the National Evangelical Church (Protestant), 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); the Greek Orthodox Church (referred to in Arabic as the Roman Orthodox Church, a reference to the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium), with 3,500 members; the Armenian Orthodox Church, with approximately 4,000 members; and the Coptic Orthodox Church, with an estimated 65,000 members.

There are many other unrecognized Christian denominations in the country, totaling tens of thousands of members. These denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Marthoma, and the Indian Orthodox Syrian Church.

There are also communities of Hindus (estimated 130,000 adherents), Sikhs (estimated 40,000), Baha'is (estimated 400), and Buddhists (no statistics available).

Missionary groups in the country serve non-Muslim congregations. The Government prohibits proselytizing by non-Muslims.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the State protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals. The Constitution states that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is a main source of legislation. The Government observes Islamic holidays.

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 dissention 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 there reportedly is no official government list of recognized churches, seven Christian churches have at least some form of official recognition that enables 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: the Roman Catholic Church, Coptic Orthodox Church, Anglican Church, and National Evangelical (Protestant) Church. 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 Church has an open file at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, but Greek Catholics worship in a rented house (two other Indian Catholic denominations also use the house for worship services).

The Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox churches reportedly 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 against assembly or 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 six new NGO licenses. As of May, there were approximately 200 NGO applications pending with the Ministry.

There were reports that in the last few years at least two groups applied for permission to build their own churches, but the Government had not responded to their requests at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2001, the Government announced that all unlicensed branches of Islamic charities would be closed by the end of 2002. During the period covered by this report, the Government removed a large number of unlicensed street-side charity boxes. In 2002, the Acting Minister of Social Affairs and Labor issued a ministerial decree to create a charitable organizations department within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. The department is responsible for regulating religious charities based in the country by reviewing their applications for registration and monitoring their operations. All charitable contributions of licensed Islamic charities in the country now require Central Bank approval.

The Higher Advisory Committee on Completion of the Application of Islamic Shari'a Provisions, created by an Amiri Decree in 1991, is tasked with preparing society for the full implementation of Shari'a (Islamic law) 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. At present the Constitution says Shari'a is a main source of legislation, but some Islamists would like to amend that to the main source.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, Prophet's Birthday, and Eid al-Fitr.

The Government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools for all students.

The Government has not taken any reported steps to promote interfaith understanding through the support or sponsorship of official programs to coordinate interfaith dialogue; however, the Prime Minister met separately with the leading Muslim sects and political groupings in early 2004 to denounce religious extremism and promote religious tolerance.

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 period covered by this report. 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 30 Shi'a mosques compared with approximately 1,200 Sunni mosques in the country.) Since 2000, the Government has granted licenses for and has approved the construction of four new Shi'a mosques. All four mosques reportedly are still under construction.

There are approximately 600 Shi'a husseiniyas in the country, approximately 500 of which are informal or unlicensed.

Family law in the country 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 prosecution. 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 Shi'a 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), which only offers Sunni jurisprudence. The Ministry of Education is reviewing a Shi'a application to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics within the country.

Shi'a remain under-represented in upper levels of government. Five Shi'a were elected to the 50-seat National Assembly in 2003, compared to 6 Shi'a in the previous assembly. Only Information Minister Muhammad Abdallah Abbas Abulhasan was a Shi'a. There were no Shi'a in the Kuwait State Security (KSS) forces.

The Roman Catholic, Anglican, National Evangelical, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Greek 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 Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Marthoma, and Indian Orthodox) are

not recognized legally but are allowed to operate in 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 they do not disturb their neighbors and do not violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing.

Members of religions not sanctioned in the Koran, such as Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is, and Buddhists, 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.

In 2002, after mounting pressure from country residents in the district of Salwa, the Government ordered the closure of a Sikh gurudwara, or temple. Sikhs who had worshipped there were able to worship at another Sikh temple. The closed house temple later was allowed to reopen. During the period covered by this report, there were no reported closures of other Sikh house temples. The Sikh community generally was able to worship freely and engage 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 country nationals. As of May, the Government had reinstated the NEC's open file status, and the Church was able to apply for and renew visas for pastors and staff; however, in accordance with the National Manpower Support Law, the Government imposed substantial annual fines for every visa applied for or renewed on behalf of noncitizen staff, in addition to routine visa and residency fees. Church leaders were negotiating with government authorities to resolve the fine issue and exempt the Church from the law's Kuwaitization requirements. As of June, the issue remained unresolved.

The Government prohibits missionaries from proselytizing to 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 period covered by this report, the Government still had not responded to the request from the Roman Catholic Church that Catholic students be allowed to study the catechism separately during the period in which Muslim students receive mandatory 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 during the period covered by this report. As of June, 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 and restrictions on assembly and religious teaching; however, it is able to operate openly without interference from government authorities. In 2002 the Government notified the Coptic Orthodox Church of its intention to reacquire the parcel of land on which the church is located for a road expansion project. During the period covered by this report, the Government granted the Coptic Orthodox Church 6,500 square meters of new land in Hawally district to build a new place of worship; the Church had only requested 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 has yet been set for the church's relocation.

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 material, 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 to 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 AWARE to promote awareness of Islam and understanding of Arab and Islamic culture and provide training courses to foreigners.

Although there is a small community of approximately 200 Christian citizens, a 1980 law prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims; however, citizens who were Christians before 1980 (and children born to families of such citizens since that date) are allowed to transmit their citizenship to their children.

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 the testimony of two women; however, in the civil, criminal, and administrative courts, the testimony of women and men is considered equally. 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, who 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 period covered by this report, 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 hijab, or 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. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports during the period covered by this report of Islamists using these laws to threaten writers with prosecution for publishing opinions deemed insufficiently observant of Islamic norms, or of religiously based prosecutions of authors or journalists.

In January 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 Mohammed's Companions. In February 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 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. The citizen now also faces more serious charges of violating the State Security Law. On May 18, the Criminal Court sentenced Al Habib to 10 years in jail in absentia for defaming (Sunni) Islam. Most Shi'a believe that hard-line Sunni Islamist pressure is behind the Government's harsh action against Al Habib, even though they too have publicly condemned his anti-Sunni statements and the audiocassette incident.

During the period covered by this report, 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 Koran; and the other specifying affronting the Prophet Mohammed's Companions and wives as a separate offense (i.e., specifically criminalizing Shi'a disparagement of Sunni religious belief). As of May, the committee had not yet issued a final decision on the issue.

The Ministry of Interior, General Customs Department, arrested several individuals for allegedly practicing sorcery and confiscated alleged sorcery-related materials during the period covered by this report.

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 period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The overall situation for Shi'a improved during the period covered by this report. In October, 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. The Government already allows Shi'a to follow their own Ja'fari jurisprudence in matters of personal status at the first instance and appellate levels. In November, the Government publicly announced its approval of another long-standing Shi'a request for the establishment of an independent Shi'a (Ja'fari) waqf (endowment), supervised by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, to govern the use of funds for Shi'a charitable and religious purposes. This year for the first time, the Government permitted Shi'a to stage a public reenactment of the Battle of Karbala depicting the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the Prophet Mohammed's grandson. Kuwait TV, also for the first time, broadcast programs on the Shi'a religious holiday of Ashoura.

The Ministry of Education continued to review a Shi'a proposal to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics within the country; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, no action had been taken on the proposal. In April, the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) decided to subsume the Faculty of Shari'a at Kuwait University (which teaches only Sunni jurisprudence) into the Faculty of Law. Due to strong opposition by Islamist parliamentarians and other Islamist groups, the Government initiated a review of the proposal. As of May, the merger of the two faculties, which would in effect dilute the influence of the Faculty of Shari'a, had not been implemented.

Thousands of Bohras (Shi'a Muslims mainly from Gujarat in western India who trace their spiritual ancestry to conversion to Islam in the 11th century) were permitted to worship freely and assemble in their own husseiniya (Shi'a community center), where social and religious functions typically are held. During the period covered by this report, their spiritual leader based in India, Syedna Mohammed Burhanudin, visited the country and met with high-level government officials.

An Apostolic Nuncio accredited to the country and also to Bahrain, Qatar, and Yemen is resident in Kuwait City. The Catholic Church views the Government's 2001 agreement to upgrade to full diplomatic relations with the Vatican as significant in terms of government tolerance of Christianity.

The Ministry of Education announced its intention to combat religious intolerance by clarifying the concept of jihad in school curriculums; this initiative encountered strong condemnation from some Islamist members of parliament. During the period covered by this report, the Ministry removed teachers thought to be Islamic extremists but did not make any reported changes to school curricula.

The new assertiveness of Shi'a in Iraq since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime has encouraged Shi'a, who comprise approximately a third of the citizen popu-

lation, to raise their profile. As a result, Sunni Islamist extremists have become more stridently hostile toward Shi'a practices. During the period covered by this report, the Prime Minister met separately with the various Muslim groups and political groupings in the country in an attempt to alleviate sectarian tensions and combat extremism.

There was some interfaith dialogue among Christian denominations during the period covered by this report. The Government did not take any reported steps to promote interfaith understanding, with the exception of the Prime Minister's separate meetings with Shi'a and various Sunni groups to promote greater religious tolerance.

Sunni Islamist groups pressed the Government to tighten restrictions on public concerts and other cultural events that they believed violated Shari'a principles. In April, the Ministry of Information approved the licensing of a popular Arab music concert, Star Academy, despite strong opposition from Sunni Islamist parliamentarians and other Islamist groups who condemned it as immoral.

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, verbal abuse, police monitoring of their activities, arbitrary detention, and imposition of travel bans and fines without due process.

The liberation of Iraq's Shi'a majority has increased the assertiveness of Shi'a in the country, who achieved some important gains period against institutionalized discrimination during the period covered by this report. Some hard-line Sunni Islamist extremists became more outwardly hostile towards Shi'a religious practices and distributed virulently anti-Shi'a leaflets outside Sunni mosques during the period covered by this report. Sunni Islamist parliamentarians repeatedly threatened to question liberal Shi'a Information Minister Abulhassan (the only Shi'a in the 16-member Cabinet) for permitting immoral concerts and other programs deemed offensive to Islam. Many Shi'a believe the harsh sentence imposed against Shi'a activist Yasser Al-Habib, who disparaged Sunni religious belief in an audiocassette in December 2003, was a result of hard-line Sunni Islamist pressure. 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.

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 NGOs that deal with religious freedom issues. Such meetings have afforded Embassy officials the opportunity to learn the status and concerns of religious groups, and to monitor progress on religious freedom.

The Embassy actively encourages the Government to address the concerns of religious leaders, such as overcrowding, lack of adequate worship space, insufficient staffing, and bureaucratic delays in processing routine requests. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy 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.

LEBANON

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

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. 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. Because of the religious nature of the political system, officially unrecognized groups 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 are 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 along religious 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 a total area of 4,035 square miles, and its population is approximately 4 million; however, because the matter of religious balance remains such a sensitive political issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932, before the founding of the modern state. Consequently, there is an absence of accurate data on the relative percentages of the population of the major religions and groups. Most observers believe that Muslims, at approximately 70 percent of the population, make up the majority, but they do not represent a homogenous group. There also are a variety of other religious groups, primarily Christian denominations, which constitute approximately 23 percent of the population, as well as a small Jewish population. There are also some very small numbers of Baha'is, Buddhists, and Hindus in the country.

There are 18 officially recognized religious groups. Their ecclesiastical and demographic patterns are extremely complex. Divisions and rivalries between groups date back many centuries and still are a factor. There has been a steady decline in the number of Christians compared to Muslims. The main branches of Islam are Shi'a and Sunni. Since the 11th century, there has been a sizable Druze presence, concentrated in rural, mountainous areas east and south of Beirut. The smallest Muslim minorities are the Alawites and the Ismaili ("Sevener") Shi'a order. The "Twelver" Shi'a, Sunni, and Druze each have state-appointed clerical bodies to administer family and personal status law through their own religious courts, which the Government subsidizes. The Maronites are the largest Christian group. 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, Latins (Roman Catholic), and evangelicals (including Protestant groups such as the Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Friends).

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 the population be respected. The Government permits recognized religions to exercise authority over matters pertaining to personal status such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. 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 it resulted in increased Muslim representation in Parliament and reduced the power of the Maronite President.

The following religious holidays 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 Prophet Mohammed's birthday, All Saints Day, Feast of the Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas. Also, the Government excuses public sector employees of the Armenian churches from work 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.

In February, the Government denied a residency permit to the head of the Pentecostal Church 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 claimed he could not fulfill this requirement because the head of the Evangelical Church refused to register him. The Evangelical Council has not registered a new church since 1975.

In 2002, the Ministry of Interior notified the "Israelite Communal Council" that the Ministry had been informed about the election of a new board for the council. This step renewed official government recognition of the council as the body representing the Jewish community in the country. The council has been an officially recognized sect in the country since 1926 and has approximately 60 followers. The Government's previous official recognition of the council was in 1985.

Citizens belonging to a faith not recognized by the Government can perform their religious rites freely; however, given the confessional nature of the political system, their political rights are not secured. For example, a Baha'i cannot run for Parliament nor can a Baha'i secure a senior position in the Government because there are no seats allocated for this confession. However, a number of religious faiths are recorded in the country 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 under a Shi'a seat. Similarly, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (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 completed a set of unified religious education material to be used in public schools. However, the materials have not yet been included in school curriculums.

The Government permits publishing of 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 the Parliament, the Cabinet, and first category civil service positions. First category civil service positions 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 the Parliament and Cabinet, and posts in the civil service, are distributed proportionally among the 18 recognized 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. 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.

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 (see Section I). 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 November 2003, the Cabinet endorsed a draft law allowing the country to adhere to the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, which makes the 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 a year. There were no prosecutions reported under this law during the period covered by this report.

Students and teachers functioning on tourist visas are deemed to have violated their visa status and consequently are 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.

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 are 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 along religious lines. Religious and political leaderships generally have maintained amicable relations in spite of their various political differences, and their differences have not resulted in conflict or violence. Most of the issues at stake concern political or development issues and each party/confession seeks to mobilize as much popular support as possible to obtain its goals.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no incidents of violence against religious persons and buildings.

In May 2003, a bomb exploded outside the home of a Western Christian missionary in Tripoli killing one person.

In 2002, a bomb blast destroyed a mosque and shrine in the town of Anjar, home to a large Armenian community, but injured no one. Authorities continue to investigate the attack on the shrine, which 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.

In 2002, an American citizen missionary affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Evangelical Alliance was killed in Sidon. It is believed that Sunni extremists, possibly operating from the nearby Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp, were responsible. In April, the investigating judge recommended filing the case as inactive, since the investigation had produced no results. The judge, however, issued a permanent search warrant to assist in determining the identity of the perpetrators.

In 2002, Ahmad Mansur, an employee at the teachers' fund office, shot and killed eight of his colleagues. Mansur claimed that he committed the crime for confessional reasons. Seven of the eight victims were Christians. Mansur was arrested and, in April 2003, the judicial tribunal (Supreme Court) sentenced him to death. The sentence was carried out on January 17.

In 1999, Sunni extremists killed four LAF soldiers in an ambush in the northern region of Dinniyeh 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. A total of five civilians, seven LAF soldiers, and 15 extremists were killed in the operation. In 2002 some of the suspects went on a hunger strike for a few days to protest trial delays and seek improvements in their detention conditions. The trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and Israel's long-occupation of South Lebanon nurtured a strong intolerance for Israelis, and Lebanese media sometimes refers to the State of Israel as "the Jewish State." Hizballah, through its media outlets, regularly directs strong rhetoric against Israel and its Jewish population and characterizes events in the region as part of a "Zionist conspiracy."

During the period covered by this report, Hizballah's Al-Manar television aired a Syrian-made anti-Semitic mini-drama that 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 U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programming. Embassy officers meet periodically with leaders of religious communities to discuss issues related to religious freedom and tolerance. The Embassy also complained to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Information about the airing of anti-Semitic programs by Al-Manar television. Furthermore, 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 confirmed this action was based solely on better enforcing visa regulations, which it has been doing since the events of September 11, 2001. The issue of political sectarianism remains a delicate one. 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, the Embassy, along with the United Arab Emirates and Canadian Embassies, co-hosted an Iftar (evening meal breaking the daily fast) attended by over 70 persons of various confessional denominations. The Embassy also sent a member of the Islamic-Christian Dialogue Committee on an international visitor program to participate in an interfaith program in the United States. Embassy staff regularly attends events sponsored by the Committee on Islamic-Christian Dialogue. USAID programs in rural areas of the country require civic participation that often involves villages of different religious backgrounds with the aim of promoting cooperation between religions.

LIBYA

The Government restricts freedom of religion. Although the country is a dictatorship, the Government is tolerant of other faiths, with the exception of fundamentalist or 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 period covered by this report; persons rarely are harassed because of their religious practices unless such practices are perceived as having a political dimension or motivation.

Information on the relationship among religions in society is limited.

In February, the U.S. Government established an official presence in the country and began discussing religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's total land area is approximately 675,501 square miles, and its population is approximately 5,241,000. The country is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim (97 percent) and there is no significant Shi'ite presence. 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 Union churches in Tripoli and Benghazi as well as small Union 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 the needs of the estimated 100,000 Christians in the country more adequately. There is an accredited Nuncio resident in Malta and a bishop resident in Tripoli. There are also Coptic and Greek Orthodox priests in both Tripoli and Benghazi.

There still may be a very small number of Jews. The World Jewish Congress reports that there were no more than 20 Jews in 1974. Most of 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 has renovated the large synagogue there; however, the synagogue did not reopen during the period covered by this report.

Adherents of other non-Muslim religions, such as Hindus, Baha'is, and Buddhists, are present.

There is no information on the number of foreign missionaries in the country. As in other Muslim countries, Christian churches are not allowed to proselytize, although generally, this restriction is not observed.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The country's leadership states publicly its preference for Islam, although it is aggressively opposed to more conservative or militant strains of Islam, which it views as a threat to the regime. The Government has banned the once powerful Sanusiyya Islamic order; in its place, the country's leader, Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi, established the Islamic Call Society (ICS), which is the Islamic arm of the Government's foreign policy and is active throughout the world. The ICS also is responsible for relations with other religions, including the Christian churches in the country. These churches report good cooperation with the ICS. The ICS's main purpose is to promote a moderate form of Islam that reflects the religious views of the Government 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, the mosques generally adhere to the government-approved interpretation of Islam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government controls most mosques and Islamic institutions, and even mosques endowed by prominent families generally remain within 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 and are tolerated by the authorities. The Government routinely grants visas and residence papers to religious staff from other nations. The Government restored the former Catholic church in the medina, and it is currently being used as an exhibition hall. It is not clear if it will be used as a church again. The Government has not yet 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 Union Church property confiscated in 1971 despite requests from the Church.

The Government allowed Orthodox priests to visit six Bulgarian medics held since 1999 for allegedly infecting children with HIV. The medics, convicted and in May sentenced to death, were permitted to attend services under guard, at least until transferred to a prison in Tripoli in June.

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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2002, a 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. Eighty-six of the 152 men were sentenced while 66 were acquitted. The convicted received sentences ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment. The appellate hearing began in December 2002, with the next hearing reportedly scheduled to take place in November when a verdict is expected.

Amnesty International reported that the detainees were held incommunicado and their whereabouts remained unknown for more than 2 years following their detention. Additionally, lawyers for the accused were neither allowed to study their case files nor meet with their clients. The lawyers were denied access to the court, and the judge appointed government clerks to replace them. In April 2001, the People's Court in Tripoli appointed legal representation for the men and family members were allowed to meet the accused briefly for the first time since their arrest; however, family members were not able to meet again with the detainees until at least December 2001.

Some practicing Muslims have shaved their beards to avoid harassment from the security services, who tend to associate wearing beards with advocacy of politically motivated Islam. In the late 1980s, the Government began to pursue a domestic policy directed against Islamic fundamentalists; the events of September 11, 2001 have reinforced Qadhafi's view that fundamentalism is a potential rallying point for opponents of the regime.

There continue to be reports of armed clashes between security forces and Islamic groups that oppose the current regime and advocate the establishment of a more traditional form of Islamic government.

There are currently 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.

A non-Libyan woman who marries a Muslim man is not required to convert to Islam, although many do so; however, a non-Libyan man must convert to marry a Muslim woman.

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

Information on the relationship among religions in society is limited, although members of non-Muslim minority religions report that they do not face harassment by authorities or the Muslim majority on the basis of their religious practices.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

In February, the United States established an official presence in the country and began discussing religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

MOROCCO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Constitution provides 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 a total land area of approximately 172,320 square miles, and its population is 32,209,101. An estimated 99 percent of citizens are Sunni Muslims. The Jewish community numbers approximately 5,000 persons and resides predominantly in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas, as well as some smaller cities throughout the country. The foreign Christian community (Roman 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, including Moroccan citizens who have converted to Christianity. Most of the country's Christians reside in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas. The Baha'i community, also located in Rabat and Casablanca, 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 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 religious holidays are considered national holidays: Eid al Adha, Islamic New Year, the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday, and Eid al Fitr. Other religions observe religious holidays without interference from government authorities.

In March, an English-speaking church group received nonprofit association status as the "Protestant Church of Rabat." Other registered churches and associations include the Evangelical, Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, French Protestant, and Anglican churches. While the Rabat Protestant Church and other minority religious groups have been operating unfettered by government authorities since the

1970s, registration allows the groups to make financial transactions and other plans as private associations and legal entities. In 2002 the Shiite organization Al Ghadir asked for official status, the first time for a Shiite association. Authorities have not yet given a response.

The Government provides tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the observance of the major religions.

The teaching of Islam in public schools is funded in the Government's annual education budget, as are other curriculum subjects. 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, including creating a chair for the study of comparative religions and the study of Latin and Hebrew at the University of Rabat.

The Government continues to encourage tolerance, respect, and dialogue among religions. In the past year, King Mohammed VI or the Minister of Islamic Affairs has received the Archbishop of Athens, delegations of American Christian and Jewish leaders, the Grand Rabbi of Jerusalem, and the chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel. The country has the only Jewish museum in an Arab nation.

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 tenth anniversary of the festival. In the past, the Government organized numerous symposia among local and international clergy, priests, rabbis, imams, and other spiritual leaders to examine ways to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. 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.

An interfaith service at the Catholic Cathedral in Rabat took place in March to commemorate the victims of the March 11 terrorist attacks in Madrid. Most senior government officials, including many ministers, attended the event. The ceremony featured Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious speakers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs monitors Friday mosque sermons and the Koranic 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, 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.

The Government bars the Islamic Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), which does not recognize the King's spiritual authority, as a political party and continued to block the publication of JCO newspapers and websites.

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 prohibition on conversion in the penal code in most cases in which courts expelled foreign missionaries.

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. Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the criminal or civil Codes; however, until 5 years ago, the authorities had jailed some converts on the basis of references to Islamic law. Nevertheless, Muslim citizens are allowed to study at Christian and Jewish schools.

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 May authorities detained and expelled seven foreign missionaries, including four Americans, for distributing Christian materials in Marrakech's main square. Some

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 small Baha'i community has been forbidden to meet or participate in communal activities; however, there were no reports that the Ministry of the Interior summoned Baha'is for questioning or denied them passports, as had occurred in past years.

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, judges will be retrained and new civil judges will be recruited. Rabbinical authorities will continue to administer family courts for Jews. Non-Koranic 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 recent change to the family code. Jewish citizens maintain their own separate inheritance law based on Jewish tradition. The Catholic Church may legally perform marriages for citizens who are confirmed Catholics.

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. However, in December 2003, the Parliament passed reforms of the Personal Status Code that give women the same rights as men in divorce cases and grant mothers custody of minor children, increase the marriage age from 15 to 18, and impose limitations on polygamy that make it all but impossible to practice. The reforms also abolish obsolete codified traditions, based on the official interpretation of Shari'a, favoring male heirs. For example, 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 the previous law.

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.

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 Jewish citizens lived throughout the country in safety. However, 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 normally, and Jewish pilgrims from around the region regularly come to holy sites in the country.

While 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. Other sources of popular consensus are the councils of ulemas, unofficial religious scholars who serve as monitors of the monarchy and the actions of the Government. Because the ulemas traditionally hold the power to legitimize or delegitimize kings through their moral authority, government policies closely adhere to popular and religious expectations. While 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 views.

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.

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 the JCO.

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.

OMAN

The Constitution or the Basic Statute of the State provides for the freedom to practice religious rites, in accordance with tradition, if their practices do not breach public order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. The Basic Statute 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 period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Non-Muslim religious worship is permitted, and Sultan Qaboos Al Bu 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's total area is 119,498 square miles, and its population is 2.33 million, of whom 1.8 million are citizens, according to the December 2003 national census. While no official statistics are kept on religious affiliation, most citizens are Ibadhi or Sunni Muslims. There also is a minority of Shi'a Muslims, particularly concentrated in Muscat's Muttrah area. 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 in the country.

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 in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution or the Basic Statute of the State provides for the freedom to practice religious rites, in accordance with tradition, if their practices do not breach public order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. The Basic Statute 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 Statute 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 and two Protestant church complexes. Hindu temples also have been built on government-provided land. In addition the Government provided land for Catholic and Protestant churches in Sohar and Salalah. Adherents of other religious faiths, typically among expatriate residents, practice their rites in less formal facilities, such as at company labor camps.

Non-Muslim 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. 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 interfaith, government-sponsored dialogue takes place on a regular basis. During the period of this report, 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 the tolerance of Islam. In March the Sultanate also hosted the Organization of the Islamic Conference's 15th meeting of the Council of Islamic Fiqh (Jurisprudence). In September 2003, the Grand Mufti participated in a conference in Bahrain on "Rapprochement Between Islamic Sects" and in December 2003 he participated in a conference in Sudan on "Islam and the West in a Changing World."

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Eid al Adha, Islamic (Hijra) New Year, 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; however, the Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. The Basic Statute does not specifically prohibit proselytizing, nor does any other law; however, in practice the Government uses immigration regulations and laws concerning morals against individuals deemed as being engaged in proselytizing.

Under Islamic law, a Muslim who recants belief in Islam would be considered an apostate and dealt with under applicable Islamic legal procedure. During the period covered by this report, there were no cases of to being punished for conversion. Non-Muslims are permitted to change their religious affiliation to Islam and proselytizing non-Muslims by Muslims is allowed. The authorities reportedly have asked members of the Baha'i community not to proselytize, in accordance with the country's law and custom. The Government records religious affiliation on national identity smart-cards for citizens, and on residency smart-cards for noncitizens. While religious affiliation was previously recorded on citizen passports, current citizen passports no longer contain this information.

The Government prohibits non-Muslim groups from publishing religious material, although non-Muslim religious material printed abroad may be brought into the country. Members of all religions and religious groups are free to maintain links with coreligionists abroad and to undertake foreign travel for religious purposes. Ministers and priests from abroad also are permitted to visit the country for the purpose of carrying out duties related to registered religious organizations. In April, the Jacobite Bishop of Syria attended Passion Week rites in the capital.

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. During the period covered by this report, there were credible reports of a number of imams being suspended for overstepping government boundaries. One suspension occurred after an imam delivered a sermon about Islam's emphasis on the accountability of rulers to the people. The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs inaugurated a new web site whereby questions on issues of the practice of faith and worship can be answered by the Grand Mufti or his representatives.

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.

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 Koran and Hadith, on the life of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions, and on the five pillars of the Islamic faith. In light of the Islamic diversity in society, the curriculum is designed not to emphasize any particular school of Islamic thought over any other.

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 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. Members of the staff at the U.S. Embassy freely participate in local religious ceremonies and have contact with members of non-Muslim religious groups. During the period covered by this report, 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 Islamic collections in the United States. The Dean of the Country's College of Shari'a and Law participated in an exchange visit to the United States focused on the rule of law.

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 period covered by this report. There was continued progress toward implementation of a Constitution that explicitly provides for freedom of worship, including the adoption of laws guaranteeing the freedom of association and public assembly. In April diplomatic relations between the country and the Vatican officially were formalized with the arrival of a papal nuncio. In May the second annual dialogue on Muslim-Christian understanding occurred. 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 4,250 square miles and its population is estimated at approximately 750,000, of whom approximately 150,000 are believed to be citizens. The majority of the 600,000 noncitizens are Sunni Muslims, mostly from other Arab countries working on temporary employment contracts, and their accompanying family members. The remaining foreigners include

Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is. Most foreign workers and their families live near the major employment centers of Doha, Ras Laffan/Al Khor, Messaeed, and Dukhan.

The Christian community is a diverse mix of Indians, Filipinos, Europeans, Arabs, and Americans. It includes Catholic, Orthodox, 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. Both citizens and foreigners attend a 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 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. While Shi'a practice most aspects of their faith freely, they may not organize traditional Shi'a ceremonies or perform rites such as self-flagellation.

The Government and the ruling family are linked inextricably to Islam. The Minister 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; however, the Government does not allow the building of new non-Muslim public places of worship without permission. In April the Government responded to concerns about the amount of space available for church construction by replacing the original site it designated with a new lot substantially larger than the previous site. However, the Government has not yet issued building permits for church construction. The Government does not maintain an official approved register of religious congregations.

In May 2003, the Government gave legal status to many Christian churches, allowing them to open bank accounts and sponsor clergy for visas.

The following religious holidays 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; however, in practice individuals and religious institutions generally are not prevented from importing 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.

In 2003, some nongovernmental organizations raised concerns that the Government had deported several non-Muslims because of their religious activities. Although the Government does not normally provide official explanations of such cases, proselytization is often the suspected cause. During the period covered by this report, there were no reported cases of such deportations.

Religious services are held without prior authorization from the Government. Although traffic police may direct cars at these services, the congregations may not publicly advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses. Some services, particularly those on Easter and Christmas, can draw more than 1,300 worshippers.

The Government does not permit Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, or members of other religions to operate as freely as Christian congregations; however, there is 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 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 imprisoned for a term no longer than 5 years. According to this new

law, those 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 occurs, but nationality is usually a more important determinant than religion. For example, Muslims hold nearly all high-ranking government positions because they are reserved for citizens. However, while Shi'a are well represented in the bureaucracy and business community, there are no Shi'as employed in senior national security positions.

Islamic instruction is compulsory in public schools. While there are no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attend secular private schools. Muslim children are allowed to go to secular private schools.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in commercial or civil cases. Convicted Muslims may earn points for good behavior and have their sentences reduced by a few months by memorizing verses from the Koran.

Shari'a law imposes significant restrictions on Muslim women. The Government adheres to Shari'a as practiced in the country 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. In cases of divorce, Shari'a is followed; younger children remain with the mother and older children with the father. Both parents retain permanent rights of visitation; however, local authorities do not allow a noncitizen parent to take a child out of the country without permission of the citizen parent. Women may attend court proceedings, but generally they are represented by a male relative; however, women 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. 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 period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In May 2003, the Government gave legal status to Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and many Asian Christian denominations. It provided them with registration numbers that allow them to open bank accounts and sponsor clergy for visas. Once each church group had a "number," it filed for visa and bank accounts. The granting of registration numbers represented major progress. During the period covered by this report, the Government issued the other paperwork that was required for the visas and bank accounts. Religious figures are now more likely to be, but still not usually, seen in public in Christian religious garb. During the period covered by this report, the Government approved a significantly larger land area than the location previously allocated for church construction. The Government has allotted a plot to each of the major registered churches. Christian denominations continued to make progress towards building churches on their designated plots of land.

In his address to the opening session of the Muslim-Christian Dialogue in May, the Prime Minister delivered a speech for the Emir calling for dialogue and mutual understanding between Islam and Christianity that received wide coverage in local media. The speech also called for broadening the dialogue to include representatives of Judaism in 2005, concluding that such dialogue would "build a decent human life where the principles of love, tolerance, and equality prevail for the good of mankind." This announcement has generated a national dialogue regarding Muslim-Christian-Jewish relations.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are generally amicable relations among persons of differing religious beliefs. The press and media generally treat non-Muslim religions in a respectful manner. During the period covered by this report, a number of public events promoted tolerance and understanding. The Indian Cultural Society staged a celebration of

Onam in September stressing mutual understanding between the Muslim, Christian, and Hindu components of Indian society. The Syro Malabar Cultural Association organized a Christmas celebration featuring a portrayal of the life of Mother Teresa attended by 1,300 persons. The film "The Passion of the Christ" was widely advertised and attended in the country. On a few occasions, privately owned newspapers or public television stations have carried articles or sermons with anti-Semitic or anti-Christian content.

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. 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. The Embassy discussed with them strategies for increasing religious freedom in the country, protection of the interests of minority congregations, and allegations of discrimination on religious grounds; it brought these issues to the attention of appropriate officials in the Government.

SAUDI ARABIA

The country is ruled by a monarchy with a legal system based on Islamic law (Shari'a). The Government does not provide legal protection for freedom of religion, and such protection does not exist in practice. Islam is the official religion, and the law requires that all citizens be Muslims. The Government prohibits the public practice of non-Muslim religions. 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 period covered by this report, although the Government continued a campaign to foster greater moderation and tolerance of religious diversity. The Government enforces a strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam. Muslims who do not adhere to the officially sanctioned Salafi (commonly called "Wahhabi") tradition can face severe repercussions at the hands of the Mutawwa'in (religious police). The Government continued to detain Shi'a leaders. 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 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.

During the period covered by this report, senior government officials made some efforts to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religions and within Islam. The Government convened a second and third session of the "National Dialogue" meeting that included members of different Muslim traditions and both men and women and issued statements condemning incitements to violence. The session released a set of recommendations that called for educational reform and development of tolerance and moderation in education. The Government also took 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 criticize publicly abuses by the religious police. However, religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society continued during the period covered by this report, including denunciations of non-Muslim religions from government-sanctioned pulpits.

In January and February, the country hosted approximately 2 million Muslim pilgrims from around the world and all branches of Islam for the annual hajj pilgrimage. The majority of citizens support a state based on Islamic law, and many oppose public non-Muslim worship, although there continued to exist differing views regarding how this should be realized in practice. There continued to be societal discrimination against members of the Shi'a minority.

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 U.S. concerns with the Government. In September 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 a total area of 1,225,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 24 million, with an estimated foreign population of 6 to 7 million. The foreign population 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 30,000 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. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops estimates there are considerably more than 500,000 Catholics in the country and perhaps as many as 1 million.

The majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims who predominantly adhere to the strict interpretation of Islam taught by the Salafi School.

Approximately 2 million citizens are Shi'a Muslims, the vast majority of whom live in the Eastern Province, where they constitute between 40 and 50 percent of the Province's citizen population.

There is no information regarding foreign missionaries in the country. Proselytization by non-Sunni Muslims is not permitted, 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. It 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. Citizens are denied the freedom to choose or change their religion, and noncitizens practice their beliefs under severe restrictions. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. The Government limits the practice of all but the officially sanctioned version of Islam and prohibits the public practice of other religions. During the period covered by this report, the Government publicly restated its policy that non-Muslims are free to practice their religions at home and in private. While the Government does not always respect this right in practice, many non-Muslims engage in private worship without harassment. 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. Consequently, the Government has declared the Koran and the Sunna (tradition) of Muhammad to be the country's Constitution. The Government follows the rigorously conservative and strict interpretation of the Salafi (often referred to as "Wahhabi") school of the Sunni branch of Islam and discriminates against other branches of Islam. Neither the Government nor society in general accepts the concept of separation of religion and state.

The country is governed according to the Basic Law, which 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, a legal system derived from the Koran and the Sunna. The Government permits Shi'a Muslims to use their own legal tradition to adjudicate cases limited to family law, inheritance, and endowment management. However, there are only two such judges, one in Qatif and one in al Hasa, which is insufficient to serve the sizable Shi'a populations of those areas and the rest of the country.

The 'Eid al-Fitr and 'Eid al-Adha religious holidays are recognized as the only national holidays. During the period covered by this report, the Government again permitted the observance of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura in the eastern city of Qatif and in the southern province of Najran. Small-scale, public observances of Ashura also occurred in Al-Hasa and Saihat.

Hindus are considered polytheists by Islamic law, which is used as a justification for greater discrimination in calculating accidental death or injury compensation. 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 compensa-

tion 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 receives.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Tolerated Islamic practice generally is limited to a school of the Sunni branch of Islam as interpreted by Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, an 18th century Arab religious leader. (This branch of Islam is often referred to as "Wahhabi," a term that many adherents to this tradition do not use. The teachings of Abd Al-Wahhab are more often referred to by adherents as "Salafi" or "Muwahiddun," that is, following the forefathers of Islam, or unifiers of Islamic practice.) 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 spreading of Islamic teachings that do not conform to the officially accepted interpretation of Islam. During the period covered by this report, there was an increasing degree of public discussion of the conservative religious traditions. Particularly after the May 2003 terror attacks in Riyadh, some citizen writers began to criticize abuses committed by the religious police (the Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice, commonly called the "Mutawwa'in"). However, discussion of religious issues is severely constrained, and the editors and writers of major local daily newspapers have been temporarily or permanently banned for the 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. However, all mosques fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The Ministry pays the salaries of imams (prayer leaders) 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 May and November 2003 terrorist attacks in Riyadh, the Government has taken public measures to control religious extremism. It continued to fire imams for immoderate preaching, and it began retraining and providing "guidance" for preachers. The Government also held training courses for Mutawwa'in in interpersonal relations.

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 this interpretation, including both those who advocated a stricter interpretation and those who favored a more moderate interpretation than the Government's, risked sanctions. Several journalists who wrote critically about the religious leadership or who questioned theological dogma temporarily were banned from writing or traveling abroad.

Under Shari'a, conversion by a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death if the accused does not recant. There were no executions for apostasy during the period covered by this report, and there have been no reports of such executions for several years. During the period covered by this report, a schoolteacher was tried for apostasy, and eventually convicted in March of blasphemy; the person was given a prison sentence of 3 years and 300 lashes. The trial received substantial press coverage.

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 has stated publicly, including before the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, 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 and acceptable locations—for determining what constitutes private worship, which makes distinctions 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. The Government usually deported those detained for visible non-Muslim worship after sometimes lengthy periods of arrest during investigation. In some cases, they also were sentenced to receive lashes prior to deportation.

The Government officially does not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country to conduct religious services, although some come 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. Proselytizing by non-Sunni Muslims also is not permitted, and the promotion of non-Salafi Sunni Islam is restricted. Muslims or non-Muslims wearing religious symbols of any kind in public risk confrontation with the Mutawwa'in. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs sponsors approximately 50 so-called "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 the subjects of officially sanctioned political and economic discrimination. During the period covered by this report, authorities continued to permit a greater degree of freedom to Shi'ites in the Eastern Province city of Qatif than in the past, overlooking religious practices and gatherings that were previously prevented. There were no reports of meeting places being closed in Qatif. 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 mosques because they fear the Government would prohibit the incorporation and display of Shi'a motifs in any such mosques. In the past, Shi'a have been permitted to build new Hussainiyas (gathering places) in Qatif and Ahsa, but the Government has closed Shi'a mosques built without government permission.

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 oneself as Shi'a will have a negative impact on career advancement. There is an absence of Shi'a representatives in government, both local and national. 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—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. There are no Shi'a principals in the approximately 300 female schools in the Eastern Province. While government officials state that textbook language with prejudicial, anti-Shi'a statements has been removed, some teachers have not been retrained and continue 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 120-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).

Since 2001, the Government has allowed Shi'a citizens to travel freely to Iran for religious pilgrimages. Travel to Iraq is more difficult due to the security situation. However, many Shi'a from the Eastern Province traveled to Karbala during Ashura.

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, Shi'a religious materials, and non-Muslim materials, such as Bibles and reli-

gious 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. Shi'a are banned from teaching religion in schools.

Public debate over reform in the country continued during the period covered by this report. In August 2003, Crown Prince Abdullah announced the establishment of the King Abd al-Aziz Center for National Dialogue. In December 2003, the Second Session of the "National Dialogue" was held in Mecca. The session issued recommendations that called for educational reform and studies to examine religious extremism in the country, and it included representatives from different Muslim religious traditions. Following the second session in January, a group of religious conservatives published a petition to the Crown Prince warning against diminishing the role of religion in school curriculums. Shi'a were represented at both sessions. Nevertheless, despite positive statements, there has been little tangible improvement in the status of those who do not adhere to the state-sanctioned version of Islam or who belong to a minority religious group.

During the period covered by this report, the Government approved the formation of the National Human Rights Association (NHRA). The NHRA, the country's first human rights organization, is chaired by a member of the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) and has stated that one of its tasks is to ensure that the Government complies with international human rights agreements to which it is a signatory, as well as with human rights standards under Islam.

Abuses of Freedom of Religion

During the period covered by this report, 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 contribute 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, although the 2002 Criminal Procedural Law allows some court proceedings to be open to the public.

While there was an improvement in press freedom during the period covered by this report, open discussion of religious issues remained constrained. 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. In November 2003, Mansur al-Noqaidan, a writer for Al-Riyadh, an Arabic-language paper, published an editorial in the New York Times criticizing the Government's response to religious extremism. Al-Noqaidan was sentenced to lashes for writing articles critical of the religious establishment in the press. This sentence had not been carried out by the end of the period covered by this report. 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.

There were no reported arrests of Shi'a religious leaders for religious violations. In September 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. According to various reports, a number of Shi'a remained in detention during the period covered by this report, and there were reports of religious prisoners who were subjected to torture. Sheikh Ali bin Ali al-Ghanim was released from prison in 2002 after 20 months' imprisonment. During the period covered by this report, there were no new reports of young Shi'a being detained for extended periods of time. In the past, in such cases charges were rarely filed, and family members were not notified where the young men were held.

The Government continued to detain and deport non-Muslims for religious reasons. In 2003, an Ethiopian Christian activist leader was deported after an employment dispute led to investigation of his religious activities.

In October 2003, two Egyptian Christians were arrested by Mutawwa'in and jailed for religious activities. They were both released in November 2003, and neither was deported. Two other Catholics were arrested in Riyadh in October 2003 by regular police and released the same day without charge.

In February, a resident Christian was deported after providing an Arabic Bible to a citizen. In April, there were credible reports that Mutawwa'in arrested Brian O'Connor, an Indian Christian, for religious reasons after a dispute with his em-

ployer. According to reports, the Mutawwa'in beat him on the day of the arrest. The reports also claim that the Mutawwa'in confiscated his personal property, in addition to two Bibles, compact disks, a personal computer, and religious materials in video format. The Indian was in custody in Al Ha'ir jail on alcohol charges at the end of the period covered by this report, but colleagues claim that the charges against him were false and based on planted evidence.

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, an offense for which no repentance is accepted and which is punishable by death. There were an unknown number of detainees held in prison on the charge of "sorcery," including the practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft." There have been no reports of executions for several years. During the period covered by this report, the local press reported several cases of arrests of foreigners and citizens for practicing sorcery.

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 the Mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners. The Government requires the Mutawwa'in to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner; however, Mutawwa'in did not always comply with the requirements. During the period covered by this report, the Government acknowledged inappropriate conduct by some Mutawwa'in but refused to provide information on the number of reported incidents or disciplinary actions. While senior officials have defended the role of the Mutawwa'in, in 2003 the committee announced plans for a training program for Mutawwa'in in interpersonal skills; however, the extent and effect of the program was not clear at the end of the period covered by this report. During this period, and particularly after the May 2003 terrorist bombings in Riyadh, reports of Mutawwa'in abuses declined considerably.

Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior included closing commercial establishments during five daily prayer observances, insisting upon compliance with strict norms of public dress, and dispersing gatherings in public places. In October 2003, the Mutawwa'in reminded foreign workers to respect Ramadan, stating that if individuals were found ignoring the societal norms associated with Ramadan, they would be liable for punishment. Mutawwa'in reproached citizen and foreign women for failure to observe strict dress codes, and they detained men and women found together who were not married or closely related. In December 2003, the press reported that the Mutawwa'in warned shopkeepers in the Eastern Province 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, the Grand Mufti restated a previously issued fatwa that declared Valentine's Day a "pagan Christian holiday" that could not be celebrated publicly. The 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.

The 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 the Mutawwa'in at the time of arrest; Mutawwa'in generally complied with this requirement. According to reports, the Mutawwa'in also are no longer permitted to detain citizens for more than a few hours, may not conduct investigations, and may no longer allow unpaid volunteers to accompany official patrols.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of abuse cases involving Hindus. 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 religion.

During the period covered by this report, there were frequent 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 May 2003 attacks, there continue 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 period covered by this report, al-Qa'ida terrorists conducted a campaign of terrorist attacks in various locations in the country. In these attacks, they killed both Muslims and non-Muslims, citizens and expatriates, and members of the

security forces. The terrorists justified these murders through an extreme religious ideology. In at least one incident, the May attack on a Western housing compound in al-Khobar, terrorists singled out non-Muslims for execution.

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 period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, senior government officials made some efforts to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religions and within Islam. The Government convened a second and third session of the "National Dialogue" meeting that included members of different Muslim traditions and both men and women. The sessions presented a set of written recommendations to the Government that called for educational reform and development of tolerance and moderation in education.

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.

During the period covered by this report, the Government approved the formation of the NHRA, the country's first independent human rights body, which is chaired by a member of the Majlis al-Shura.

Senior leaders, including the Crown Prince and the Grand Mufti, called for moderation. These efforts continued to intensify after the May and November 2003 terror attacks in Riyadh. In August 2003, the highest religious authorities called on Muslims in the country to turn away from religious extremism and unjustified jihad.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

As a deeply conservative and devout Muslim society, there is intense pressure to conform to societal norms. During the period covered by this report, 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.

The conservative religious leadership also exerts pressure on the state to maintain its strict Islamic practices. To combat religious extremism, in May 2003 the Government announced the firing of several hundred prayer leaders and began to retrain them and other mosque employees.

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. The Government held a second session in Mecca in December 2003 that discussed educational reform, including the role of religion in school curriculums.

There is societal discrimination against members of the Shi'a minority. The majority of citizens support a state based on Islamic law and oppose public non-Muslim worship, 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.

Many non-Muslims who undertook religious observances privately and discreetly during the period covered by this report were not harassed. However, some non-Muslims claimed that informants paid by the 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.

During the period covered by this report, the local press rarely printed articles or commentaries disparaging other religions; however, following the May attack in

which terrorists killed six Westerners in Yanbu, the Crown Prince publicly stated that he believed Zionism was behind recent acts of terrorism.

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 period covered by this report, 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 2003 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. The U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom visited the country in October 2003 and met with senior government officials to raise religious freedom issues. In addition, Embassy officers met with MFA officials at various other times to discuss matters pertaining to religious freedom. In September 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 continues to monitor the activities of all groups, including religious groups, discourage proselytizing, particularly when it is deemed a threat to the relations among religious groups, and ban the members of Jehovah's Witnesses as 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 mainly 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 a total area of approximately 71,498 square miles, and its population is approximately 18 million. Sunni Muslims represent approximately 74 percent of the population (approximately 12.6 million persons). Other Muslim groups, including Druze, Alawi, Ismailis, Shi'a, and Yazidis, constitute an estimated 16 percent of the population (approximately 2.7 million persons). A variety of 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 autonomous Orthodox churches, the Uniate churches, which recognize the Roman Catholic Pope, and the independent Nestorian Church. There are approximately 85 Jews. It is difficult to obtain precise population estimates for various 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. The Government also permits the presence, both officially and unofficially, of other Christian denominations, including Baptist, Mennonite, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Sunni Muslims are present throughout the country. Christians tend to be urbanized, and most live in Damascus and Aleppo, although significant numbers live in the Hasaka governorate in the northeast and in the Wadi al-Nasara. A majority of the Alawis live in the Latakia governorate. A significant majority of the Druze population resides in the rugged Jabal al-Arab region in the southeast. The few remaining Jews are concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo. Yazidis are found primarily in the northeast.

Foreign missionary groups are present but operate 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.

All religions and orders must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all meetings by religious (and nonreligious) groups, 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 study and practice of moderate forms of Islam. For example, the Government selects moderate Muslims for religious leadership positions, is intolerant of and suppresses extremist forms of Islam, and accepted the election in March 2003 of two devout yet moderate Islamists as independents to the Parliament. Their election demonstrates the Government's desire to encourage moderate Islamic voices in the Parliament.

The Government generally does not prohibit links by its citizens with coreligionists in other countries or with a supranational hierarchy.

Orthodox and Western Easter, as well as three Muslim religious holidays (Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and the Prophet Mohammed's birthday) are recognized as 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 have continued to practice their faith privately despite the official ban.

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 are present but operate discreetly. Proselytizing is not officially illegal; however, those who proselytize can be prosecuted for "posing a threat to the relations among religious groups." Most charges of this kind carry sentences of 5 years to life imprisonment, although often such sentences are reduced to 1 or 2 years depending on the case. There were no reported cases in the last 3 years of the prosecution of an individual or group on this charge.

The security services constantly are alert to 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 follows closely the practice of its adherents. The Government has allowed many mosques to be built; however, it monitors and controls sermons and often closes mosques between prayers.

The Government primarily cites tense relations with Israel as the reason for barring Jewish citizens from government employment and for exempting them from military service obligations. Jews also are the only religious minority group whose passports and identity cards note their religion. Jewish citizens must obtain the permission of the security services before traveling abroad and must submit a list of possessions to ensure their return to the country. Jewish persons also face extra scrutiny from the Government when applying for licenses, deeds, or other government papers. The Jewish community is prohibited from sending historical Torahs abroad on the grounds that they are a part of the country's cultural heritage. There is a law against exporting any of the country's historical and cultural treasures, and the Government applied this law to the Jewish community. This creates 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 contributing factor in determining career opportunities. For example, Alawis hold predominant positions in the security services and military well out of proportion to their percentage of the population.

In keeping with the Government's secular policy, the military does not have a chaplain's corps, members of the military do not have direct access to religious or spiritual support, and soldiers are expected not to express their faith overtly during work hours. For example, Muslims are discouraged from praying while on duty. Religious minorities, with the exception of Jews, are represented among the senior officer corps. Jewish citizens are forbidden from serving in the Government and armed services and are 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 Shari'a (Islamic law), 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 October 2003, the Government changed the age at which a woman loses the right to custody of her sons from age 9 to age 13 and her daughters from age 12 to age 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 who inherits an unmarried sister's share from their parents' estate is obligated to provide for the sister's well-being. 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 are government-run and nonsectarian, although in practice some schools are run by Christian and Druze minorities. There is mandatory religious instruction in schools for all religious groups, with government-approved teachers and curriculums. Religion courses are divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. There are classes only for Islamic and Christian instruction; other groups such as Druze, Alawi, Ismailis, Shi'a, and Yazidis participate in the Islamic courses. In the past, Jews had a separate primary school that offered religious instruction on Judaism and other traditional subjects; however, the school recently was closed due to the dwindling size of the Jewish community. Although Arabic is the official language in public schools, the Government permits the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic), and Chaldean in some schools on the basis that these are "liturgical languages." There is no mandatory religious study at the university level.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Political prisoners held by the Government include an unknown number of members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Their arrests were motivated primarily by the Government's view of militant Islamists as potential threats to regime stability. An unknown number of Islamists may remain in custody.

A Presidential amnesty issued in February 2003, 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 country's Grand Mufti Ahmed Kuftaro and his Abu Nur Mosque continued to engage in a wide variety of activities promoting Christian-Muslim understanding.

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 re-

ligious faiths mainly attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation. Relations among the various religious communities generally are amicable, and there is little evidence of societal discrimination or violence against religious minorities. The press, which the Government tightly controls, generally is careful to avoid publishing anti-Semitic remarks in their anti-Israeli articles; however, there were reports of anti-Semitic articles in previous years. During the period covered by this report, a Syrian production company created an anti-Semitic program and filmed it inside the country. The theme of this program centered on the alleged conspiracy of the "Elders of Zion" to orchestrate both world wars and manipulate world markets to create Israel. The show was not aired in the country but was shown elsewhere. There were occasional reports of friction between religious faiths, which may be related to deteriorating economic conditions and internal political issues. Specifically, in 2003 there were reports of minor incidents of harassment and property damage against Jews in Damascus perpetrated by individuals not associated with the Government. According to local sources, these incidents were in reaction to Israeli actions against Palestinians.

In March 2003, the usually moderate 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. During the period covered by this report, there were no similar statements made by the Grand Mufti.

Although no law prohibits religious denominations from proselytizing, the Government is sensitive to complaints by religious groups of aggressive proselytizing by other groups and has intervened when such activities threatened the relations among religions. Societal conventions make conversions relatively rare, especially Muslim-to-Christian conversions. In many cases, societal pressure forces those who undertake such conversions to relocate within the country or leave the country to practice their new religion openly.

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 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, and also during high-level visits, U.S. officials regularly emphasize the importance of freedom of religion.

U.S. Embassy officials continued to remain sensitive to any change in the degree of religious freedom in the country.

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 and abuses. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official 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 Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the wearing of hijab (a type of headscarf worn by some Muslim women) in offices, on the street, and at certain public gatherings.

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 63,170 square miles, and its population is approximately 10 million. Approximately 99 percent of the population is nominally Muslim. There is no reliable data on the number of practicing Muslims. There is a small indigenous Sufi Muslim community; however, there are no statistics regarding its size. Reliable sources report that many Sufis left the country shortly after independence when their religious buildings and land reverted to the Government (as did those of Orthodox Islamic foundations). Although the Sufi community is small, its tradi-

tion of mysticism permeates the practice of Islam throughout the country. During annual Ramadan festivals, Sufis 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 ethnic Arab citizens who have converted to Christianity. According to the Diocese of Tunis, the Catholic Church now operates 11 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. There is one Protestant church, located in Tunis, with a few hundred members. Catholic and Protestant religious services also are held in a few other locations, such as private residences, on an occasional basis. The Russian Orthodox Church has approximately 100 practicing members and operates a church in Tunis and another in Bizerte. The French Reform Church operates 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). There are also 50 members of 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 second largest indigenous 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 function 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 hijab. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official state religion and stipulates that the President must be a Muslim.

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 other authorized religious ceremonies, such as marriages or funerals. 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 religious holidays are considered national holidays: Aid El-Kebir, Ras Al-Am El-Hejri, Mouled, and Aid Essighir. 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 unhindered.

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 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

period covered by this report, 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.

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 on Djerba.

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 periodically 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 period covered by this report.

Although there have been reports of cases in which the Government punished individuals who converted to another faith from Islam by denying them a passport, no confirmed cases occurred during the period covered by this report. No statutory prohibitions against conversion exist; however, the Government uses bureaucratic hurdles to dissuade potential converts. In previous years, the Government denied converts the right to vote and serve in the military, among other rights.

The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, and it uses this prohibition to refuse to register the Islamist party An-Nahdha and to prosecute suspected party members. The Government maintains tight surveillance over Islamists. The Government revoked the identity cards of an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Islamists, which among other consequences prevents them from being employed legally. The Government refused to issue passports to Islamists. In several cases, including during the period covered by this report, the Government seized the passport of a close relative of an Islamic activist, allegedly for the sole reason that the person was related to an Islamic activist. The Government maintained that only the courts possess the power to revoke passports; however, reports indicate that the Government rarely observed this separation of powers in politically sensitive cases.

The Government does not permit Christian groups to establish new churches, and proselytizing is viewed as an illegal act against public order. Foreign missionary organizations and groups are 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 prefers not to renew the visas of suspected missionaries or to pressure their employers not to extend their contracts. However, there were no reported cases of official action against persons suspected of proselytizing during the period covered by this report.

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 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 forbids the wearing of 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 the hijab 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 reports that police sometimes detained men with beards whom the Government considered Islamic and 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 Koranic School is part of the Government's national university system.

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 and thus void when the couple returns to the country. 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. In addition the Government routinely prevents Christian U.S. citizen mothers from taking their U.S. citizen children back to the United States without the express agreement of the children's Muslim citizen fathers. The U.S. Embassy was attempting to resolve three such cases during the period covered by this report.

Generally, Shari'a-based interpretation of civil law is applied only in some family cases. Some families avoid the effects 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 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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, credible sources estimated that approximately 600 persons were serving prison sentences because of their membership in the illegal Islamist group 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. Sources indicated that an imam in the city of Kairouan issued a fatwa against former Education Minister and human rights activist Mohamed Charfi in 2002. The reasons for such an edict are unclear, but Charfi is a prominent activist and potential government opponent and many in civil society circles believe the edict was aimed at intimidating him.

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. However, in 2002, a terrorist attack outside the historic El-Ghriba synagogue on the island of Djerba killed 21 persons and damaged the interior of the synagogue. Two weeks before the annual El-Ghriba pilgrimage (See Section II), the driver of a truck transporting liquefied flammable gas detonated an explosive device while the truck stood at the synagogue's compound wall. The explosion killed 17 tourists and 4 citizens, including the driver. An Islamic group claiming al-Qa'ida sympathies announced responsibility for the attack.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

There were unconfirmed reports of a few incidents of vandalism directed against the property of members of the Jewish community.

There is great societal pressure against Muslim conversion to other religions, and conversion from Islam is relatively rare. Muslims who convert may face social ostracism for converting. There is some conversion among individuals in the Christian and Jewish communities.

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 period covered by this report. Notably, many observers consider this trend to be less a sign of increasing religiosity among young citizens than a reaction to perceived increasing pressure from modernity on traditional Arab/Muslim culture.

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 Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Baha'i religious leaders throughout the period covered by this report. The Embassy fostered regular exchanges that included components designed to highlight U.S. traditions of religious tolerance and pluralism. The Embassy regularly disseminated the publication "Muslim Life in America," and Embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues with government officials and members of civil society on various occasions during the year. The Embassy helped organize a conference on religious tolerance and encouraged the development of academic studies in comparative religions.

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 some change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report; government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. In August 2003, the Government closed the Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-up, an Abu Dhabi-based think tank that published and distributed literature, sponsored lectures, and operated a website. This center was accused of providing a platform for some anti-Semitic individuals. In October 2003, the Dubai Evangelical Church Center (DECC) opened in a large compound of Christian churches just outside of Dubai. In April the evangelical Christian men's group "Promise Keepers" held a 2-day religious convention in Dubai, the first of its kind in the Middle East.

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's total land area is 32,300 square miles, and its population is approximately 4 million. Approximately 85 percent of the population is comprised of noncitizens. The vast majority of the country's citizens are Muslims; approximately 85 percent are Sunni and the remaining 15 percent are Shi'a. Foreigners are predominantly from South and Southeast Asia, although there are 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 Fujeirah. 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 in effect 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 operate 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 are also two Sikh temples and one Hindu temple operating in the country, and another Sikh temple reportedly being built in the Emirate of Dubai. Four emirates are home to parochial, 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 Dubai and one in Sharjah.

Non-Muslim religious groups do not receive funds from the Government; however, those with land grants are not charged rental payments and the local ruling families donate the land grants 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.

The Government supports in practice a moderate interpretation of Islam.

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.

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 Koran 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 Koran.

During the period covered by this report, 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 Religious Advisor to the President, Ali Al Hashemi, regularly represents the country at Islamic, ecumenical, Christian conferences and events in other countries. In September 2003, he attended a conference in Bahrain intended to forge closer ties between Islamic sects, and in June he attended a conference on Islamic counseling in Yemen.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Waqfa, Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the Prophet's Birthday, Ascension Day, and Eid Al-Fitr. There are no reports that these holidays negatively affect other religious groups because of their religious affiliation; however, all residents and visitors are required by law during Ramadan to publicly respect and abide by some of the behavior restrictions imposed on Muslims, they are forbidden to eat, drink, or smoke publicly during fasting hours.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Federal Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf distribute 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. There were reports that an unknown number of foreign imams were deported in 2003 for preaching messages of intolerance. 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 period covered by this report, the church had not received permission to open, although construction was completed in 2000. According to a church representative, construction on the Catholic church has been completed, but there are legal issues arising from the church's change in building plans that are preventing it from opening. Parishioners continue to hold mass in the Anglican church compound.

There are no Buddhist temples; however, Buddhists, along with Hindus and Sikhs in cities without temples, conduct religious ceremonies in private homes without interference. There are two Sikh temples and one Hindu temple in the country, and another Sikh temple reportedly is being built in the Emirate of Dubai. There are only two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the large Hindu community, one in Dubai and one in Sharjah. Official permission must be obtained for their use in every instance, posing a hardship for the large Hindu community.

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. There were no reports of such threats during the period covered by this report.

In 2002, Dubai Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested a Filipino evangelical Christian pastor, Fernando Alconga, for distributing Christian and Biblical literature to an Egyptian Muslim in a parking lot. Alconga was detained

for 36 days for "preaching other than the Islamic religion" and then released on bail. His movements in the country were not restricted, and he continued to preach to church congregations throughout the country after his release. A panel of Islamic scholars found Alconga's materials to be "acceptable for private use, but not for distributing to non-Christians," and a court convicted him of "abusing Islam." In 2003 Alconga was given a suspended 1-year sentence and deported to the Philippines. After this case concluded, the Dubai Supreme Court ruled that deportation would always be required as part of the punishment for all types of religious crimes committed by expatriates. The court further ruled that appellate courts do not have the authority to cancel deportation orders from a lower court's sentence, so long as the conviction stands.

Immigration authorities routinely ask foreigners applying for residence permits to declare their religious affiliation; however, the Government reportedly does not collect or analyze this information, and religious affiliation is not a factor in the issuance or renewal of visas or residence permits. 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."

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 non-Muslim, non-Christian 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 occurs. 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 period covered by this report. 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 Article 84 of the Executive System of Private Education, private schools found teaching subjects that contravene Islam, defame any religion, or contravene the nation's ethics and beliefs may face penalties, including closure.

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

In October 2003, the DECC opened in a large compound of Christian churches just outside of Dubai. The de facto ruler of Dubai donated the land to the interdenominational United Christian Church of Dubai (UCCD). Both Catholic and

Protestant churches have been built on the compound, and other Christian congregations without their own buildings, such as the Anglicans and Orthodox, regularly conduct services in the existing facilities.

Many Christians were pleased that the Government allowed Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" to air in theaters over the Easter holiday season. Attended by Christians and Muslims alike, the movie broke the country's box office records during its run.

In January 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. Currently, Ras Al Khaimah has only one non-Muslim worship center, which various communities rent to conduct their services.

In April the evangelical Christian men's group "Promise Keepers" held a 2-day religious conference in Dubai. About 500 persons from all emirates as well as other countries in the region attended the event, which was the first of its kind in the Middle East. There was no government interference or police presence at the event.

Also in April, a high-ranking leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, traveled to the country to meet with government officials and build links between the Russian Orthodox Church and Muslim leaders. Widely reported in the press, Kirill said he applauded the Government's determination to promote fraternity and tolerance among different nationalities and cultures. The 8,000-memeber Orthodox Russian community in the country hopes to eventually build a church in Sharjah.

In June 2003, the Government initiated a public religious education campaign to promote a better understanding of Islam, including a 1-year training course for 166 imams.

In July 2003, the Vatican representative in the Arabian Peninsula, Bishop Bernardo Giovanni Gremoli, delivered a lecture on "Religious Tolerance in the UAE and the Importance of Dialogue Among Religions." During the lecture, Bishop Gremoli stated that in the country, each person can practice his own religion and live in peace. He also said that the Vatican has always enjoyed good relations with the country, and that religious leaders representing the country and the Vatican have exerted tremendous efforts to improve dialogue over the past few years.

In 2003, the Coptic Orthodox Church received permission to build a church in Abu Dhabi; construction began in April and is expected to take more than a year to complete. Two new churches also opened: a 1,000-plus capacity Coptic Orthodox church and service facility in Sharjah; and a 1,000-plus capacity Catholic church and hall in Fujeirah. In 2002 the Al Ain municipal government authorized a land grant to the Anglican Church. The Fujeirah government authorized land grants for the construction of an Indian Orthodox church and a Catholic church. Also in 2003, the Indian Orthodox church opened in a public ceremony.

In 2003, a government official arranged for a Christian prayer and healing "festival" at the Dubai Handicapped Club. Lee Jae-Rock, a pastor of the Manmin Joong-Ang Church in Seoul, Korea, spoke and performed a healing ceremony for 100 persons, including nationals, with various disabilities. Arabic and Russian television crews recorded the service, and Jae-Rock's words were translated into Arabic.

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 larg-

est 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.

In August 2003, the Government closed the Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-up, an Abu Dhabi-based think tank affiliated with the Arab League and created in 1997, that published and distributed literature, sponsored lectures, and operated a website. Over the past few years, the center published some books with anti-Semitic themes such as "The Zionist Movement and its Animosity to Jews" and "Al Buraq Wall, Not Wailing Wall." It also allowed some anti-Semitic language on its website and hosted some speakers who promoted anti-Semitic views. One such event was a symposium on "Semitism" in the summer of 2002, during which remarks attributed to center employees and speakers denied the Holocaust. According to a statement from President Zayed's office, the Government closed the center because its activities "starkly contradicted the principles of interfaith tolerance" advocated by the president.

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 officials expressed concern to the Government about statements and publications expressing religious intolerance on the website of Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-up prior to its August 2003 closure. 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. For example, in 2003 U.S. Embassy and Consulate officials closely monitored the criminal proceedings and deportation in the case of the evangelical Christian pastor convicted of proselytizing. The Consul General urged government officials to dispose of the case in a manner acceptable to all parties involved.

WESTERN SAHARA

The Moroccan Constitution provides for freedom of religion. 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 period covered by this report.

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 a total area of approximately 102,706 square miles, and its population is approximately 267,400. 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 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, through the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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 period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Followers of religions other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs; however, the Government forbids conversions and prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing.

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 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 also are a few thousand Ismaili Muslims, mostly in the north.

Almost all Christians are temporary foreign residents, except for a few families living in Aden who trace their origins to India. There are a few Hindus in Aden who also trace their origins to India. There are several churches and Hindu places of worship in Aden, but no non-Muslim public places of worship exist in the former North Yemen, largely because the northern part of the country does not have a history of a large, resident foreign community as exists in the south.

Christian missionaries operate in the country, and most are dedicated 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. There is also a German Christian charitable mission in Hodeida and a Dutch Chris-

tian medical mission in Saada. An American Baptist congregation maintains an affiliation with the hospital in Jibla, which it ran for more than 30 years before transferring management to the Government in 2002. The Anglican Church runs a charitable clinic in Aden. A U.S. nongovernmental organization (NGO), run by the Seventh-day Adventists, operates in several of the country's governorates. Nearly all of the country's once-sizable Jewish population have emigrated. Less than 500 Jews are scattered in a handful of villages between Sana'a and Saada in the northern part 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; however, there were some restrictions. Followers of other religions are free to worship according to their beliefs and to wear religiously distinctive ornaments or dress; however, the Government forbids conversions, requires permission for the construction of new places of worship, and prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing and holding elected office. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. The Government does not keep track of an individual's religious identity.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing. Under Islam as applied in the country, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death. During the period covered by this report, there were no reported cases in which persons were charged with this crime or prosecuted for it by government authorities. The Government also did not allow the building of new non-Muslim public places of worship without previous authorization. Weekly services for Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Christians are held in the auditorium of a private company building in Sana'a without government interference. Christian church services are held regularly in other cities in private homes or facilities such as schools without harassment, and such facilities appear adequate to accommodate the small numbers involved.

The Papal Nuncio, resident in Kuwait, presented his credentials to the Government in 2002 and was accredited as a nonresident ambassador. During the period covered by this report, there were several official Vatican visits to the country.

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-Muslims in the country are foreigners, and they attend private schools.

There are no legal restrictions on the few hundred Jews who remain in the country, although there are traditional restrictions on places of residence and choice of employment (see Section III).

The Government made efforts to prevent the politicization of mosques in an attempt to curb extremism, including by 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 pan-Islamic organizations; however, the Government monitored their activities through the police and intelligence authorities.

In 2001, the Government mandated the implementation of a 1992 law to unify educational curriculums and administration of all publicly funded schools; the process of absorbing publicly funded Islamic schools into the national system was still ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. The Government renewed its efforts in June by ordering the closing of all private schools that are not licensed by the Government. Private and national schools are also prohibited from teaching courses outside of the officially approved curriculum. This move was announced in an attempt to curb the growing extremism that many within the country and elsewhere attribute to ideological and religious extremism that is taught in these schools.

Non-Muslim citizens may vote but may not hold elected office.

Following 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 of the procedure, including for religious institutions, has been extremely limited, and very few properties have been returned to any previous owner.

Under Shari'a-based law and social custom as practiced in the country, men are permitted to take as many as four wives, although very few do so. Legally the minimum age of marriage is 15; however, the law largely is not enforced, and some girls

marry as early as age 12. In 2001, the Women's National Committee proposed an amendment to increase the minimum age for marriage to 18. The proposal was approved by the Cabinet and was still pending in the Parliament at the end of the period covered by this report. The law stipulates that the wife's "consent" to the marriage is required; "consent" is defined as "silence" for previously unwed women and "pronouncement of consent" for divorced women. The husband and the wife's "guardian" (usually her father) sign a marriage contract; in Aden and some of the country's outlying governorates, the wife also signs. The practice of bride-price payment is widespread, despite efforts to limit the size of such payments.

Shari'a-based law also requires that the wife must obey the husband. She must live with him at the place stipulated in the contract, consummate the marriage, and not leave the home without his consent. Husbands may divorce wives without justifying their action in court; however, courts routinely mandate lengthy reconciliation periods prior to granting the husband's petition for divorce. A woman has the legal right to divorce; however, she must provide a justification, such as her husband's nonsupport, impotence, abrogation of the marriage contract (for example, violating guarantees regarding her education or employment options), or taking of a second wife without her consent. A woman seeking a divorce also must repay a portion of her bride price, which creates an additional hardship.

Women who seek to travel abroad must obtain permission from their husbands or fathers to receive a passport and to travel. They also are expected to be accompanied by male relatives; however, enforcement of this requirement is irregular. Shari'a-based law, as practiced in the country, permits a Muslim man to marry a Christian or Jewish woman, but no Muslim woman may marry outside of Islam.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Official government policy does not prohibit or provide punishment for the possession of non-Islamic religious literature; however, on occasion there were unconfirmed reports that foreigners were harassed by police for possessing such literature. In addition some members of the security forces occasionally censor the mail of Christian clergy who minister to the foreign community, ostensibly to prevent proselytizing.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that police harassed and detained persons suspected of apostasy to compel them to renounce their conversions.

There were no reports of persons detained or imprisoned based solely on religion; however, police and security forces continued to detain suspected members of radical Islamist groups throughout the period covered by this report. Since September 2001, several hundred "Afghan Arabs" (Islamists who had returned after spending time in Afghanistan) have been detained for questioning. Although many such persons were released in days some reportedly continue to be detained beyond the maximum detention 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 period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The country is predominantly Muslim. There are very small numbers of religious minorities, and relations among religious groups generally are amicable. There were no reported incidents of violence or discrimination between the adherents of the two main orders of Islam practiced in the country, Zaydi and Shafa'i Islam. 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.

Religious minorities generally live in harmony with their Muslim neighbors. Apart from a small but undetermined number of Christians and Hindus of South Asian origin in Aden, Jews are the only indigenous religious minority. Their number has diminished significantly—from several tens of thousands to a few hundred—due to voluntary emigration over the last 50 years. Although the law does not discriminate against Jews, Jews traditionally are restricted to living in one section of a city or village and often are confined to a limited choice of employment, usually farming

or handicrafts (primarily silver working). They are generally respected for their craftsmanship and their silver work is highly prized. Jews may and do own land. They may vote; however, as non-Muslims, they may not hold elected office (see Section II). Traditionally the tribal leaders of the regions in which the Jews have resided are responsible for protecting the Jews in their areas. A failure to provide this protection is considered a serious personal dishonor.

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 maintains 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 period covered by this report.

SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan experienced civil war and political instability for 24 years. There was no functioning central government until December 22, 2001, when the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) took office. In June 2002, the Emergency Loya Jirga, a gathering of Afghan representatives from throughout the country, declared that the official name of the country was the "Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA)" and elected Hamid Karzai as President. Karzai subsequently formed a Cabinet including female members and broad ethnic representation. On January 4, 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.

During most of 2001, the Taliban, an ultra-conservative Islamic movement, controlled approximately 90 percent of the country. Under the Taliban, freedom of religion was restricted severely. On October 7, 2001, a U.S.-led coalition began military operations aimed at toppling the Taliban regime and eliminating the al-Qaida terrorist network in Afghanistan, and by mid-November the Taliban had been removed from power. In December 2001, a U.N.-sponsored Afghan peace conference in Bonn, Germany, approved a broad agreement for the establishment of a transitional government to rule during an interim period while preparations for a new constitution and national elections were instituted. The Bonn Agreement mandated the creation of a Constitutional Commission, Human Rights Commission, Judicial Commission, and a Civil Service Commission to oversee reforms in these areas.

From December 2001 to January 4, the legal basis for religious freedom in Afghanistan was found in the December 2001 Bonn Agreement and in the 1964 Constitution.

The Bonn Agreement designated the Constitutional Commission with responsibility for drafting a new constitution. A nine-member Drafting Committee of the Constitutional Commission was formed in October 2002 and completed a first draft of the new Constitution in March 2003. President Karzai named a full Constitutional Commission with 35 members in April 2003. Commission membership included seven women, four Shi'a, an Ismaili, a Hindu, and broad ethnic representation. The full Commission completed its review of the draft Constitution in June 2003 and launched a public consultation process shortly thereafter. In November 2003, TISA released the draft Constitution, which was vigorously debated at the CLJ in December 2003 and ratified on January 4. The new Constitution renames the country as the "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" and proclaims that the "religion of the state of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 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."

TISA regulations and the new Constitution provide for freedom of religion, and TISA generally respected this right in practice.

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. The Shari'a Faculty of Kabul University followed the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. Conservative elements also called for the primacy of Shari'a law in the country's legal system. However, the new 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 to cases dealing with personal matters involving Shi'as;

there is no separate law applying to non-Muslims. At the end of the period covered by this report, the country had ratified seven international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (March 2003).

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 Government officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 251,738 square miles and its population is approximately 25.8 million. Reliable data on the country's religious demography is not available; a census has not been taken in decades. However, 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; any proselytizing is discreet.

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 Koran and the customary practices of the Prophet Mohammed. 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, which could be characterized as a branch of Sunni Islam, centers on orders or brotherhoods that follow charismatic religious leaders.

Several areas of the country 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 Bamiyan. 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 country's small Hindu and Sikh population, which once numbered about 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. According to a Sikh community leader in Kabul, an estimated 3,000 Sikh and Hindu families were living in the country at the end of 2003; however, this figure could not be verified.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Until January the country relied upon the Bonn Agreement and the 1964 Constitution. Since January 4, the new Constitution has been in effect; however, in practice, its provisions will only be fully enforceable once the long-term process of overhauling and reforming the government and judicial sector is completed. The June 2002 Loya Jirga declared that the official name of the government was the "Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan." The new Constitution declares the country to be an "Islamic Republic." As with the 1964 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 in any part of the country by the authorities. Proselytizing is viewed as contrary to the beliefs of Islam; however, there were no laws forbidding proselytizing. There was an unconfirmed report that the Taliban killed a former Muslim cleric on June 30, allegedly for preaching Christianity. Article 1 of the current, unreformed, penal code states that the code addresses only Tazir (less serious) crimes, and that the more serious categories of Qisas and Hudod crimes fall under Shari'a law. Blasphemy and apostasy (converting from Islam to another religion) fall under the latter category, and are—in theory—punishable by death.

The new Constitution makes no reference to Shari'a law, 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. Provisions, particularly Article 31, of the 1964 Constitution protected freedom of speech. Article 34 of the new Constitution protects freedom of expression and of the press. The Afghan Press Law adopted in April 2002 contained an injunction against information that "could mean insult to the sacred religion of Islam and other religions." The ambiguity surrounding what constitutes offensive material offered the potential for abuse of this clause in order to restrict press freedom and intimidate journalists. The Afghan Press Law did not require information to follow Shari'a law. However, the section on criminal rules stated 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. 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 holidays are celebrated as public holidays. The TISA has proclaimed the first day of Ramadan, Eid-ul Fitr, Eid-ul Adha, the Prophet Mohammad's birthday, 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 in the country 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 of the Prophet Mohammad's grandson, Hussein. Under the Taliban, Shi'a could not celebrate their holy days openly, although they were able to do so in prior years. There were no reported incidents surrounding Shi'a religious celebrations during the year-and-a-half following the Taliban's fall, but there was an incident during the reporting period (See Section III).

The parts of the country's educational system that survived more than 20 years of war placed considerable emphasis on religion. During the reporting period, the public school curriculum included religious subjects, but 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. A curriculum and textbooks that emphasizes general Islamic terms and principles steadily replaced the preaching of jihad in schools. By the end of the period covered by this report, all Kabul schools and the surrounding provinces were using the new (non-jihad) texts, which covered approximately 15 provinces 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, 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 the reporting period.

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. 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Conversion from Islam is considered apostasy and is punishable by death under Shari'a. During the reporting period, there were unconfirmed allegations that converts to Christianity faced societal discrimination and threats. 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. 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 October 2003, the Supreme Court banned communists from forming a political party because they are atheists. Christian-based international relief organizations generally operated without interference, but antigovernment militants sometimes harassed foreign missionaries and other religiously oriented organizations. For example, 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 NGOs of preaching Christianity; there were no further details on the attack during the reporting period.

In November 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. 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. While 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. In central Kabul, construction of the first mosque in the country to make provision for women worshippers continued.

There were a few reports that government forces at local levels prohibited music, movies, and television on religious grounds. For example, in April officials in Nangarhar Province briefly banned the appearance of women singers on television; however, the officials' superiors reversed their prohibition. On January 14, Kabul Television broadcast a female singer for the first time in more than a decade, prompting protests from conservatives in the Supreme Court who briefly forced the station to stop airing such performances. Moderates in the Government lifted that ban in late January, saying women singers on television were permitted under the new Constitution. Previously, in January 2003, the Supreme Court 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 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. The nongovernmental stations broadcast a mix of Afghan, Indian, Pakistani, and Western music. The stations had no religious content other than brief prayers and Koran readings on the government-controlled radio station.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The new Constitution requires that the President and vice-President of Afghanistan be Muslims, and does not distinguish in this respect between Sunnis and Shi'as. This is not explicitly stated in the case of government ministers, but the oath required of ministers does suggest adherence to the Muslim faith. There is no religious requirement for Members of Parliament in the new Constitution.

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 Gah and distributed them to other town residents.

The Governor also blocked the Hazara/Shi'a community from building a mosque in Lashkar 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 Gah, the Governor had only partly honored this agreement by the end of period covered by this report.

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 the attack, no suspects had been apprehended by the end of the reporting period.

In an October 2002 incident in Kabul, 28 Tablighi Jamaatis, itinerant lay Muslim missionary preachers of the Sunni branch of Islam, were detained by police for a week. In November 2003, 12 Tablighi preachers were detained for a day in Kandahar. There was no further 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.

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

The fall of the Taliban and the subsequent establishment of the AIA and the TISA resulted in a major improvement in religious freedom. The Bonn Agreement and the 1964 Constitution replaced Taliban policies and laws. Sikh and Hindu representatives at the June 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga reported that they no longer were repressed and felt free to practice their religions. The Government encouraged Sikhs, Hindus, and other minorities to return, and there was a small but steady flow of returnees during the year. The new Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, assembly, and religion within the limits of the law, as well as equal rights for women and minorities.

The Government has stressed reconciliation and cooperation among all citizens. Although the Government primarily is concerned with ethnic reconciliation, it also has expressed concern about religious tolerance. The TISA responded positively to all international approaches on human rights, including religious freedom. The Government emphasized ethnic and intra-faith reconciliation indirectly through the creation and empowerment of the Judicial, Constitutional, and Human Rights Commissions, comprised 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 period covered by this report, the TISA included Hazara and other Shi'a figures, including Vice-President Khalili, Minister for Women's Affairs Habiba Sorabi, Human Rights Commission Chair Dr. Sima Samar, Minister of Planning Ramazan Bashardost (until March 7 the Minister of Planning was Mohammad Mohaqqeq, who is also a Hazara Shi'a), Minister of Commerce Mustafa Kazemi, Minister of Agriculture Hussein Anwari, and Minister of Transportation Mohammad Jawed.

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 the reporting period.

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 Kabul municipal authorities allocated an alternative cremation site to the

Sikh-Hindu community; however, by the end of the reporting period, this community had not yet assumed control of the allocated site.

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 majority Sunni population. Most Shi'a Muslims 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 from locality to locality. However, the active persecution of the country's 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.

Before the October 2001 collapse of the Taliban, repression by the Taliban of the Hazara ethnic group, which is predominantly Shi'a Muslim, was particularly severe. Although the conflict between the Hazaras and the Taliban was political and military as well as religious, the religious affiliation of the Hazaras was a significant factor leading to their repression. In practice the rigid policies adopted both by the Taliban and by certain opposition groups affected adversely adherents of other branches of Islam and other religions.

On March 1, a riot that began when 2 individuals were seen mocking a Shi'a procession in Kabul to commemorate the Battle of Karbala led to 2 deaths and over 30 injuries. This was the only reported incident surrounding Shi'a religious celebrations during the reporting period.

Non-Muslim minorities such as Sikhs and Hindus continue to face social discrimination and harassment, but this circumstance is not systematic and the Government is trying to address their concerns.

In June 2003, 12 Pashtun Sunnis were killed during an attack on their bus in northeastern Helmand province. Robbery was reportedly the motive, but there were claims that the assailants were Hazara Shi'as. The Human Rights Commission investigated the case and concluded during the summer of 2003 that the attack was related to the narcotics trade and that religious sectarianism was not the motive.

On January 6, unidentified gunmen killed 12 Hazaras while they were traveling in southern Helmand Province. According to the Human Rights Commission, the motive for the attack was a family feud.

After the fall of the Taliban, there continued to be episodic reports of individuals 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.

In Herat there were continued reports of forced chastity examinations by religious police for 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 was a systematic practice or took place on a sporadic basis, sometimes at the request of family members and in the context of an extremely socially conservative environment. There were no reports of examinations directed at non-Muslims. Local officials also have 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.

Attacks by remnants of the al-Qaida and Taliban networks continued during the reporting period. Several killings of religious leaders and attacks on mosques were attributed to al-Qaida and Taliban members who objected to their victims' links with the Karzai administration and to their public interpretations of Islam.

In December 2002, the 15-member Kandahar Ulema-u-Shura issued a religious edict denouncing the Taliban's call for jihad. Subsequently, the Taliban denounced

the Ulema-u-Shura and left pamphlets in mosques and bazaars threatening religious leaders and government supporters.

On April 28, 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, the Government indicated that there had been no arrests in the case, which continues under investigation.

On June 30, 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 individuals were arrested, one in July 2003 and the other in August 2003. Subsequently, one was released by court order and the other escaped from jail in October 2003.

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 or convictions and no further information on the persons originally detained.

On May 7, 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-Qaida were responsible for the crime. The assailants had not been identified by the end of period covered by this report.

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 United States has worked with the TISA 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 of 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 TISA 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.

U.S. 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 United States 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 grant from the U.S. Embassy. "Democracy" has a circulation of approximately 3,000. One of the goals of "Democracy" is to challenge "religious despotism" and to promote a liberal and tolerant interpretation of Islam. Grants through USAID 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.

Between March and July, 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).

During the reporting period, the U.S. Embassy donated approximately $33,000 (1,419,000 Afghani) from the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation for restoration of the Mullah Mahmood Mosque in Kabul.

In at least one instance, U.S. officials met with and assisted an Afghan Christian allegedly being persecuted for his faith.

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. While the Government generally respects this provision in practice, 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 Government states that acts of violence against members of religious minority groups are politically or economically motivated and cannot be solely attributed to religion, human rights activists reported an increase in religiously-motivated violence.

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, the number of Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities who experienced discrimination by the Muslim majority increased. During the period covered by this report, the Government was led by the centrist Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which heads a four-party coalition that includes two Islamic parties, Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote. The majority of Hindus traditionally vote for the opposition Awami League (AL). In the 300-seat Parliament, religious minorities hold 7 seats—4 for the AL and 3 for BNP. Six non-Muslims hold deputy or state minister or equivalent positions in the Government. In 2002 the newly elected BNP Government arrested and intimidated AL leaders and repealed key legislation passed by the previous AL administration. 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.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 53,000 square miles, and it has a population of nearly 140 million. Sunni Muslims constitute 88 percent of the population. Approximately 10 percent of the population is Hindu. The remainder of the population is mainly Christian (mostly Catholic) and Buddhist. Members of these faiths are found predominantly in the tribal (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, although many other indigenous groups in various parts of the country are Christian. There also are small populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their populations vary from a few hundred to 100,000 adherents for each faith. Religion is an important part of community identity for citizens, including those who do not participate actively in religious 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. Several dozen missionaries, primarily based in Dhaka and Chittagong, are engaged in social-development projects. Ethnic and religious minority communities often overlap and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern regions of 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. The Government generally respects this provision in practice; however, some members of the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, and Ahmadiya communities experience discrimination.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the Government; however, all nongovernmental organizations (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 this report, the Government took action in a nontransparent manner against six NGO's 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 then underway. Ultimately, the grants given in 2001 expired early this year and have not been renewed. Members of targeted NGOs re-

ported harassment and intimidation, including pressure against traveling abroad to participate in religious freedom events, by law enforcement and intelligence officials.

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 Muslim mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples, and Christian 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.

The Government has taken some 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 2003, as well as supporting peaceful activities during Ramadan and before Eid-Ul-Azha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 2001 the High Court ruled illegal all fatwa's, or expert opinions on Islamic law. Fatwa's 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. However, 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 fatwa's illegal, the High Court intended to end the extrajudicial enforcement of fatwa's or other declarations by religious leaders. The pronouncement resulted in violent public protests (see Section III). 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 determined.

Foreign missionaries were allowed to work in the country; however, their right to proselytize is not protected by the Constitution. The Constitution provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion; however, the right to proselytize is not discussed in the Constitution. Proselytization is neither permitted nor prohibited by law. As is the case for 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 subsequently were unable to renew their visas, which must be renewed annually. In mid-2001 the Department of Immigration and Passports began to issue regularly a new visa category for foreign missionaries working in the country. The processing of the new visas apparently created complications initially; however, there were no recent reports of any current problems with receiving 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, particularly at the high school and university levels. 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 religion 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 a 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 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. No further claims were to be accepted after that period expired. At 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, the 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.

In 2001 the Forestry Department inaugurated an eco-park on the lands inhabited by the predominantly Christian Khasi tribes in Moulvibazar. Although indigenous Khasis had lived on these lands for generations, the Government did not recognize their ownership. The Government claimed ownership and stated that the Khasis were occupying the land illegally. On January 3, a member of the Garo tribe died and several others sustained injuries when police and forestry officials fired on Garos attempting to obstruct the construction of a wall in Madhupur forest in the northern Tangail district as part of a forest conservation and eco-park project. Rather than go to the police, the victim's family filed a petition with the magistrate accusing nine government officials of the crime. The magistrate court initiated a judicial inquiry, but by the end of the period covered by this report, there was no action. In July 2002, Forest Department guards killed a Khasi member, Abinash, and injured 10 others in an attempt to evict the Khasis. Police had not arrested anyone in connection with the killing by the end of the period covered by this report.

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 polygyny, and it is practiced rarely. 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. Marriage is governed by family law of the respective religions. 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 deadline for the Government to declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. On January 8, the Government announced a ban on all Ahmadiya publications. The ban has not been formalized, but police detained a boy for 3 days for possession of Ahmadiya books, and during demonstrations in April and May, police entered and seized documents from two Ahmadiya mosques. 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, the police are not enforcing the ban.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Reports of harassment by BNP supporters 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; however, the BNP 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 minorities. 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. It also alleged that some of the reports of violence were fabricated or exaggerated. Since the submission of the report, neither the High Court nor the Government has taken further action.

Since the 2001 elections, religious minorities reportedly have continued to be targeted for attacks. An NGO claimed that in the first 4 months of the period covered by this report, there were approximately 200 incidences of discrimination or violence against religious minorities. Reportedly, incidents include killings, rape, torture, attacks on places of worship, destruction of homes, forced evictions, and desecration of items of worship. However, many such reports have not been verified independently. The Government sometimes has failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who are often local gang leaders.

On February 27, 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.

In January a Hindu temple and three houses belonging to Hindus in Chittagong were burned. According to a prominent human rights NGO, the temple was on disputed ground, and the temple priest sought to expand temple lands. Subsequently, there was conflict between the police, the local fire brigade, and Hindu devotees, who accused the police of destroying the temple. They attacked the police and fire brigade personnel with stones and incendiary devices. There has been no subsequent legal action.

In November 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 Hindu cleansing effort. Local human rights NGO Odhikar 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. Subsequently, within a month of the attack, police arrested 5 persons, 3 of whom confessed to the magistrate and claimed that 14 people were involved in what they said was an attempted robbery. At the conclusion of the period covered by this report, police had completed their investigation and prepared a criminal complaint for submission to the court.

Using a compilation of newspaper reports, Ain-O-Shalish Kendra (The Law and Mediation Center), a human rights NGO, filed in 2001 a writ petition with the High Court asking that the Government be ordered to investigate the reported incidents of post-election violence against minorities and submit its findings to the court. The Government submitted its report to the court in 2002, stating that it had taken action against perpetrators of violence against members of the minority communities wherever such incidents took place. The government report said investigations revealed that many of the reports were false or exaggerated. During the period covered by the report, the High Court took no further action in response to the Government's report.

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 Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Foreign Minister Morshed Khan 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 accused in the killing. Their trial opened in district court on May 16, with the judge saying that he would depose witnesses intensively until May 23; at the end of the period covered by this report, the case was continuing.

One human rights activist claimed that, especially after the 2001 elections, religious minority groups have been targeted for acts of violence, which has led to the requirement for guards to be present at church and temple ceremonies. These claims continued during the period covered by this report; however, there also has been violence during important Muslim holidays.

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 Baniachar bombing. In September 2002, the commission submitted its report to the Government. The commission's final 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 are not pursuing the case actively.

Feminist author Taslima Nasreen remained abroad during the period covered by this report, while criminal charges were pending against her for insulting the religious beliefs of the country's Muslims. In May 2002, the Government banned her subsequent book, 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 Bangladeshi intellectuals, in response to a defamation suit filed by a Bangladeshi writer; "Ka" was sold openly on street corners after the ban.

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.

Improvement and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Following demands by the IOJ, an Islamist coalition partner of the ruling BNP, that Ahmadiyya publications be banned and that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims, the BDG announced such a ban on January 8. However, several days after senior-level visits by the U.S. Embassy and a Congressional delegation on January 11 to 14, the Prime Minister announced the Government would not declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims.

After the U.S. Embassy and several human rights organizations expressed concerns, the Government in March deferred proposed legislation by a BNP parliamentarian that would have created a blasphemy law based on the Pakistani model.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the 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, or property rights—are often unclear. Religious minorities are vulnerable and often have even less access to justice than other citizens. Police, who generally are ineffective in upholding law and order, are normally slow to assist members of the religious minority community, thereby perpetuating an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence (see Section II).

Intercommunal violence caused many Hindus to emigrate to India between 1947 and 1971 and continued on a smaller scale throughout the 1980s. Since the 1991 return to democracy, emigration of Hindus has decreased significantly, which generally can be attributed to the significant reduction in the Hindu population over the last 30 years. In recent years, emigration has been primarily motivated by economic and family reasons. Nevertheless, incidents of communal violence continue to occur.

Newspapers reported attacks on Hindu homes and rapes of Hindu women at several places in the country soon after the October 2001 election. According to a human rights organization, at least 10 Hindu women were raped and a number of Hindu homes were looted by low-level BNP workers a few days before the BNP took power from the nonpartisan caretaker government that supervised the election. Some incidents of rape and looting also took place in the southwestern district of

Bagerhat. The situation improved after the new government members visited the areas and deployed additional police to troubled locations. In February 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 laws. In two cases, courts convicted the perpetrators. On September 10, 2003, a Speedy Trial Court in Barisal sentenced Ibrahim Khali and Dulal to life in prison (in practice 22° years) for raping a Hindu woman at Annoda Proshad in Lord Hardinge Union of lal Monhon subdistrict of Bhola district. The court also fined each convict approximately $165 (Taka 10,000) or alternatively to spend an additional 6 months in prison. Both convicts are serving their terms. On October 23, 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 have 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 2003 36 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 the rhetoric of leaders of the Islami Okkiya Jote, an Islamic party and coalition partner of the ruling BNP. Many mainstream Muslims view Ahmadis as heretics. In October 2003, 17 Ahmadiya 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 Ahmadiya 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, the Government announced a ban on all Ahmadiya publications; the ban has not been promulgated officially, but in April and May, police entered and seized documents from Ahmadiya mosques (See Section II).

Reportedly, at the end of May, the Khatme Nabuwat Andolan, a group of anti-Ahmadiya Islamic clerics, threatened to evict thousands of Ahmadiyas from their homes in Patuakhali, Rangpur, and Chittagong. The same group also threatened to attack Ahmadiya mosques in those districts. Many Ahmadiyas appealed to the administration for protection and security. In April allegedly 12 Ahmadiya houses were destroyed; 15 Ahmadiya 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 has been taken against their assailants.

Public reaction to the High Court's 2001 ruling that fatwas were illegal resulted in violence. Following the court's decision, a number of NGOs organized a rally in Dhaka and transported busloads of persons, mostly women, from different parts of the country to express support for the ruling, which they said was a victory for women and for all who suffered abuses in the name of fatwa. However, Muslim groups contended that fatwas were an integral part of a Muslim's daily life and called the ruling an attack on their religious freedom. Islamist parties and the then-opposition BNP cited the ruling as an example of the Awami League government's "anti-Islam" attitude. Islamic groups organized blockades to prevent buses from entering Dhaka for the rally and protested the ruling and the NGO rally. In the ensuing violence, a police officer was killed inside a mosque, and an NGO office was ransacked. Subsequently, a case was filed and several persons were arrested for the murder. One of the accused was a well-known Islamic scholar and the chairman of a faction within the IOJ; the high court dismissed all charges against him.

The law neither permits citizens to proselytize nor prohibits proselytization; however, local authorities and communities often object to efforts to convert persons from Islam to other religions. Moreover, 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.

There is no known indigenous Jewish community. Anti-Semitic attitudes are widespread among Islamist activists and are sometimes evident in commentaries, particularly on the Middle East, in mainstream newspapers.

In general citizens do not perceive Christians as Western society surrogates, and Christians are not targeted or harassed in response to the widespread perception by citizens that the U.S.-led war on global terrorism is "anti-Muslim. "

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government routinely discusses general and specific 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. The U.S. Embassy twice 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. Both times Jammat Islami demurred. Democracy and governance projects supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) include tolerance and minority rights components. The Embassy 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.

Due to the increased attacks on Ahmadis, the U.S. Government made religious freedom a central point of discussion in most meetings with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Law Minister, the Home Minister, and several other ministers beginning in December 2003. The Embassy expressed its views on this matter to the media and public forums related to democracy and governance. In February the Ambassador was the ranking guest at a religious freedom conference organized by a national human rights group.

Embassy and visiting U.S. Government officials regularly visited members of minority communities to hear their concerns and demonstrate public support.

Following demands for the ban of Ahmadiyya publications and that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims, the Government announced such a ban on January 8. 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. After the Embassy and several human rights organizations expressed concerns, the Government in March deferred proposed legislation by a BNP parliamentarian that would have created a blasphemy law based on the Pakistani model.

The Embassy assisted U.S. Christian-affiliated relief organizations in guiding paperwork for 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, USAID provides, among other topics, course work for religious leaders on human rights, HIV/AIDS, gender equality, and trafficking in persons.

BHUTAN

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limited this right in practice. The Drukpa discipline of the Kagyupa school, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, is the state religion, although many citizens also practice the Ningmapa branch of Buddhism.

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

Societal pressure for conformity with Drukpa Kagyupa norms was prevalent.

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and Bhutan; however, 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 a total area of 18,146 square miles. Population figures vary greatly, but the Government estimated a population of approximately 700,000. Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of the declared population practice either Drukpa Kagyupa or Ningmapa Buddhism. The Drukpa discipline is practiced predominantly in the western and central parts of the country, although there are adherents in other regions. Government-supported monasteries also practice the Kagyupa sect of Buddhism. 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 their cultural norms and dress have been declared by the monarchy to be the standard for all citizens.

The Ningmapa school of Mahayana Buddhism is practiced predominantly in the eastern part of the country, although there are adherents in other parts of the country. Most of those living in the east are ethnic Sarchops, the 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 royal family practices a combination of Ningmapa and Kagyupa Buddhism. There is a tradition of respect among many citizens for the teachings of an animist and shamanistic faith called Bon, which revolves around the worship of nature, and predates Buddhism. Bon priests still can be found in the country, but very few citizens adhere to this faith. Bon rituals sometimes are included in Buddhist festivals.

Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, are present in very small numbers throughout the country. There was reportedly only one building used for Christian worship in the south of the country, the only location where the concentration of Christians was sufficiently large to sustain a church building. Elsewhere, Christian families and individuals practiced their religion at home. There are no Christian missionaries operating in the country.

Approximately one-quarter to one-third of the population, ethnic Nepalese who live mainly in the south, practice Hinduism. The Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Shakta, Ghanapath, Puranic, and Vedic schools are represented among Hindus.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limited this right in practice. The Drukpa discipline of the Kagyupa school, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, is the state religion. Proselytization is illegal, and Bhutanese NGOs operating outside the country claimed the Government prohibited conversions. Dissidents also contended that Buddhist texts were the only printed religious materials permitted to enter the country. The Government vehemently denied these claims and asserted that its citizens are free to practice any religion openly.

The Monastic Body (or Monk Body) comprised 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 many decisions affecting the state. Major Buddhist and Hindu religious holidays are also state holidays.

Questions of family law, such as inheritance, marriage, divorce, child custody, and adoption, traditionally are resolved according to a citizen's religion: Buddhist tradition for the majority of the population and Hindu tradition for the ethnic Nepalese. The Government subsidized monasteries and shrines of the Drukpa discipline and provided aid to approximately one-third of the Kingdom's 12,000 monks. By statute 10 seats in the 150-seat National Assembly and 2 seats on the 11-member Royal Advisory Council are reserved for monks of the Drukpa discipline.

Religious communities must secure government licenses before constructing new places of worship. Reports by ethnic Nepalese citizens suggested that this process was biased toward Buddhist temples. The Government provided financial assistance for the construction of Drukpa Kagyupa and Ningmapa Buddhist temples and shrines. Monks and monasteries of the Ningmapa school also received some state funding. NGOs reported that the Government rarely granted permission to build a Hindu temple; however, the Government provided some scholarships for Sanskrit studies at Hindu-language universities in India. Followers of religions other than Buddhism and Hinduism generally were free to worship in private homes, but they could not erect religious buildings or congregate in large groups in public. There were no Hindu temples in Thimphu, despite the migration of many ethnic Nepalese to the capital city. However, the King has declared major Hindu festivals to be national holidays, and the royal family participates in them.

NGO representatives living outside of the country reported that Drukpa Kagyupa and Ningmapa Buddhist religious teaching is permitted in schools, but that other religious teaching is not. The Government contended that Buddhist teaching is permitted only in monastic schools, and that no religious teaching is permitted in other schools. Buddhist prayer is compulsory in all government-run schools, according to dissidents.

The Government requires all citizens, when in public places, to wear the traditional dress of the Buddhist majority, but it only strictly enforced this law for visits to Buddhist religious buildings, monasteries, government offices, schools, and when attending 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 conversions. 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 were afraid to worship openly for fear of discrimination; moreover, senior Christian church officials reportedly are denied entry visas and, consequently, cannot confirm new priests.

Dissidents alleged that the Government restricted the import of printed religious matter; only Buddhist religious texts were allowed to enter the country.

Certain high level 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 for Government services were asked their religion before the services were rendered.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Ethnic Nepalese were subject to discrimination by the authorities in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when many were forcibly expelled (although others may have left voluntarily). The root causes of this official discrimination and the expulsions were cultural, economic, and political; however, to the degree that their Hinduism identified them as members of the ethnic Nepalese minority, religion may have been a secondary factor. The Government contended that many of those expelled in 1991 were illegal immigrants with no right to citizenship or residency, and others had "voluntarily emigrated." More than 100,000 ethnic Nepalese continued to live in refugee camps in eastern Nepal and were seeking to return to their homes. An estimated 15,000 more resided outside of the camps in the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal.

On June 18, 2003, the Government announced the results of the categorization of refugees of the first verified camp and its willingness to begin repatriating "genuine Bhutanese" citizens. The first category, "bona fide Bhutanese," who were evicted forcibly, comprised 2.4 percent of the total and can immediately return to the country with full rights as citizens; however, during the period covered by this report, none returned. The second category, "voluntary emigrants," comprised 70.5 percent and will be allowed to return but must apply for citizenship, a process that could take up to 2 years; however, at this juncture, none have returned to the country and applied for citizenship. The third category, "non-nationals," comprised 24.2 percent and will not be allowed to return to the country. The fourth category, "criminals," reportedly will be allowed to return if they agree to face criminal charges in the judicial system.

The Government resettled Buddhist citizens from other parts of the country on land in the south vacated by the expelled ethnic Nepalese 13 years ago. Human rights groups maintained that this action prejudices any possibility for land restoration for 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.

A religious freedom web site alleged that on April 11, following Easter Sunday services, police raided three Protestant house churches in Sarpang district in the southern part of the country. There were no arrests; however, church members were warned to stop meeting and told that the government viewed their meetings as "terrorist activities." The Government denied these reports as totally false.

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

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 agitation by the ethnic Nepalese community. These preoccupations on the part of the Government and many Buddhists still were present during the reporting period. They were reflected

in official and societal efforts to impose the dress and cultural norms of the Ngalop ethnic group 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. Societal prejudices against this group continue as has the Government's policy on forced retirement of refugee family members in government service and the resettlement of Buddhists on land vacated by expelled ethnic Hindu Nepalese in the south. Ethnic Nepalese with family members in the refugee camps also complained that they were unable to obtain new government-issued national identity cards.

Some of the country's few Christians, mostly ethnic Nepalese living in the south, claimed that they were harassed and discriminated against by the Government, local authorities, and non-Christian citizens. A religious freedom web site published unconfirmed reports that Christians were harassed by police during private worship at Easter and were told to discontinue any religious activities; however, the Government denied these reports. Some NGOs reported increased intimidation by the Government of persons who do not look like Bhutanese 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 border crossings and United Liberation Front of Assam camps that were reportedly based in the southern part of the country in 2003. However, in December 2003, the Government destroyed these camps during a military offensive.

There have been some attempts to promote interfaith understanding. There were regular exchanges between monks of the two schools of Buddhism represented in the country. The King's example of making Hindu festivals official holidays and observing them also had a positive effect on citizens' attitudes.

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 January an Embassy officer from New Delhi and State Department officials discussed religious freedom in the context of the refugee issue and the draft Constitution in Thimphu. In March the U.S. Ambassador to India and an Embassy officer traveled to the country and discussed religious freedom, the draft Constitution, and the refugee issue with the King and other senior members of the Government. The U.S. Government has also worked to promote religious freedom and other democratic values by sponsoring several Bhutanese citizens to the United States on International Visitors Programs, which were structured to convey the importance of democratic and religious freedoms.

INDIA

The Constitution provides for secular government and the protection of religious freedom, and the central Government generally respected these provisions in practice; however, it sometimes did not act effectively to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This failure resulted in part from the legal constraints inherent in the country's federal structure, and in part from shortcomings in the law enforcement and justice systems. Ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities were seen by some extremists as a signal that such violence may be committed with impunity.

The status of religious freedom improved in a number of ways during the period covered by this report yet problems remained in some areas. While the government took some steps to decrease attacks and bring about justice, attacks against minorities persisted. However, there were no new anti-conversion laws during the period covered by this report and Tamil Nadu announced its decision to repeal its anti-conversion law. During the period covered by this report, the Gujarat police conducted no illegal surveys of Christians and no tridents (trishuls) were distributed in any state. "Hindutva," the politicized inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms to the exclusion of other religious norms, influenced governmental policies and societal attitudes.

During most of the period covered by this report, the central Government was led by a coalition called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The leading party in the coalition was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party with

links to Hindu extremist groups that have been implicated in violent acts against Christians and Muslims. Human rights groups and others also suggested that the Government's inadequate response to acts of violence against religious minorities was due at least in part to links between extremist groups and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during much of the period covered by this report. The BJP was also head of state governments in Goa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh. The BJP-led government, which previously campaigned on a Hindutva platform, adopted more inclusive rhetoric regarding minorities and took some steps to decrease violence.

In late May, a new coalition, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), came to power and pledged to "take immediate steps to reverse the trend of communalization of education," which it said had occurred when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) governed India. Although the new UPA government retained the new NCERT books introduced by the NDA government for this academic year, they are currently being revised and new texts, with corrected information, will be introduced in the next academic year.

In May President APJ Abdul Kalam invited Dr. Manmohan Singh, a member of Congress Party, to form a coalition government led by the UPA to replace the NDA, which had been in power since 1998. The UPA pledged to respect the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance, and to pay particular attention to the rights of religious minorities.

Dr. Singh, a Sikh, became the first member of a religious minority to be prime minister. As President Kalam is a Muslim and the President of the governing Congress party (Sonia Gandhi) is a Christian, three of the most important politicians in India are members of religious minority communities.

Tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and to a continued extent between Christians and Hindus, were a problem. Attacks on religious minorities occurred in several states, which brought into question the Government's ability to prevent sectarian and religious violence. However, some improvements were observed during the period covered by this report. In April the Supreme Court handed down a major decision ordering a retrial of the Best Bakery Case, in which Hindu extremists killed 14 Muslims when the Best Bakery, in the Hanuman Tekri area of Vadodara, was attacked by a large mob. There have been allegations that police failed to take adequate action to save the victims during the attack. The Supreme Court also stated that the guilty were likely to escape prosecution as long as the case was tried in the state of Gujarat, and, therefore, ordered that the trials be moved to the jurisdiction of the Bombay (Mumbai) High Court. In November 2003, the Kheda District Sessions Court in Gujarat sentenced 12 persons to life imprisonment for the murder of 14 Muslims in Ghodasar village. Three persons were sentenced to 2 years rigorous imprisonment for unlawful assembly in the same case. This case was the first conviction in conjunction with the violence directed against Muslims by Hindus that took place in Gujarat in February and March 2002 and which left an estimated 2,000 dead and 100,000 displaced into refugee camps. At the end of the period covered by this report, only 3 other cases related to the Gujarat rioting completed trial in the lower level courts. Two cases resulted in acquittals and two in convictions. In the two acquittals (Best Bakery and Mod) the Hindu offenders were exonerated in June and July 2003; while in two other cases, lower courts ruled in November 2003 and January to convict and sentence 13 Hindu offenders (after the Supreme Court heard the Best Bakery case). It was alleged widely that the police and state government did little to stop the violence promptly, and at times encouraged or assisted Hindus involved in the riots. Despite substantial evidentiary material, the judicial commission responsible for investigating the riots reported inconclusive findings. There were reports of intimidation and harassment of witnesses; however, the NHRC and Supreme Court continued to press investigation of the Best Bakery case and the NHRC pressed for a retrial. While progress in the Gujarat justice process took place under the BJP-led government, the election of the UPA government encouraged human rights groups to demand further prosecution of the remaining perpetrators of the Gujarat riots. Violence and discrimination against Muslims and Christians continued in other parts of the country. To date there have been no prosecutions of any of those responsible for religiously motivated killing and destruction in other parts of the country.

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 and its consulates continued to promote religious freedom through contact with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. During meetings with important leaders of all of the significant minority communities, U.S. officials discussed reports of ongoing harassment of minority groups, converts, and missionaries. U.S. agencies provided funding for an NGO program designed to assist inter-

nally displaced persons in Gujarat following communal violence in the area in 2002; and U.S. officials continued to meet with officials and private citizens concerning the violence. U.S. officials also have continued to engage state officials on the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion laws.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 1.3 million square miles and a population of slightly more than 1 billion. According to the latest government estimates, Hindus constitute 82 percent of the population, Muslims 12 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 2.0 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, less than 2 percent. Hinduism has a large number of branches. 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. 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 northeastern states, 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" see Section II), and other non-Hindu tribal groups have converted to other faiths to escape widespread discrimination and achieve higher social status. However, lower caste and Dalit converts continue to be viewed by both their coreligionists and by Hindus through the prism of caste. Converts are regarded widely as belonging to 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. However, such converts often lose benefits conferred by the Government's affirmative action programs because these, according to the Constitution, are reserved only for those having scheduled caste status. There are anti-conversion laws for Dalits in the states of Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Arunachal Pradesh.

There are a number of immigrants, primarily from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, who practice various religions. Immigrants from Bangladesh usually reside near the border.

According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, there are approximately 1,100 registered foreign missionaries in the country representing a variety of Christian denominations (see Section II).

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's political system is federal in character, according state governments exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and maintaining order, which has limited the central Government's capacity to deal with abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), must receive a state government's permission before investigating a crime in that state. However, the federal government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have intervened to maintain order when state governments were reluctant or unwilling to intervene. In cases relating to the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat, central agencies intervened in two instances.

In January at the direction of the Indian Supreme Court, the CBI began investigating the rape of Bilkis Rassol (which occurred in 2002) and the murder of her relatives. In May according to the Indian Supreme Court's direction, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) assigned several of its officers to guard witnesses in four major post-riot cases in Ahmedabad and Anand districts.

There are no registration requirements for religious groups; however, missionaries of all religious minority groups are required to register with the local police station during their visits to the country.

There are a number of federal and state laws that regulate religious life in India. These include The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), several state anti-

conversion laws, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act, India's Foreigners Act, and the Indian Divorce Act.

The Government is empowered to ban a religious organization if it has provoked intercommunity friction, has been involved in terrorism or sedition, or has violated the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), which restricts funding from abroad. Christian organizations have complained that this prohibition prevents them from properly financing their humanitarian and educational activities in the country. Muslim and Hindu groups also have difficulty funding their activities under the act.

Anti-conversion laws have been in effect in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa since the 1960s, and laws against forcible conversions exist also in Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. In 2002–03 the states of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat passed "anti-conversion" laws, and after facilitating the passage of the law in Tamil Nadu, the Chief Minister threatened to visit Kerala to press for a similar law there. Under both laws, those "forcing" or "alluring" individuals to convert are subject to criminal action. However, the Gujarat state government did not promulgate the rules and regulations necessary for implementation until May. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the law had not yet been used. In September 2003, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes proposed legislation to regulate forcible conversion. Under the proposed law, those wishing to convert to a new faith must request permission from a local government authority. A proposal to introduce a national anti-conversion law lapsed in 2002, and the new UPA Government has not promoted such a law. During the period covered by this report, no new anti-conversion laws were passed, and Tamil Nadu announced its decision to repeal the law; although it took no action in this regard during the period of this report.

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.

The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988 makes it an offense to use any religious site for political purposes or to use temples for harboring persons accused or convicted of crimes. While specifically designed to deal with Sikh places of worship in Punjab, the law applies to all religious sites.

There is no national law that bars a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs; however, speaking publicly against other beliefs is considered dangerous to public order and is prohibited by India's Foreigners Act. This act strictly prohibits visitors who are in the country on tourist visas from engaging in religious preaching without first obtaining permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

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 as men. The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 places limitations on interfaith marriages and specifies penalties, such as 10 years' imprisonment, for clergymen who contravene its provisions. Under the act, no marriage in which one party is a non-Christian may be celebrated in a church. However, the Indian Divorce Act does not bar interfaith marriages in other places of worship.

Legally mandated benefits are assigned to certain groups, including some groups defined by their religion. For example, minority institutions can reserve seats for minorities in educational institutions. Minority run institutions also are entitled to funding, although with restrictions, but benefits accorded Dalits are revoked if they convert to Christianity. However, if they convert to Buddhism, they do not lose the benefits.

There are many religions and a large variety of denominations, groups, and subgroups in the country, but Hinduism is the dominant religion. Under the Constitution, the Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh faiths are considered different from the Hindu religion, but the Constitution often is interpreted as defining Hinduism to include those faiths. This interpretation has been a contentious issue, particularly for the Sikh community that views itself as a unique religion and clearly distinct from Hinduism. In this regard, Sikhs have sought a separately codified body of law applying only to them.

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) have appointed members and are tasked respectively with protecting the rights of minorities and protecting human rights. These governmental bodies investigate allegations of discrimination and bias and can make recommendations to the relevant local or central government authorities. These recommendations generally are followed, although they do not have the force of law. In August

2003, the NCM announced a plan to conduct a detailed study of the country's Christian minority for the first time, and in March it urged all religious leaders not to issue any political "diktats" during the Parliamentary (Lok Sabha) elections. In September 2003, the NCM urged the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to intervene in the November 1984 anti-Sikh riots as it did in the Best Bakery Case of Gujarat. In the south, the state governments of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh also established minorities commissions. For example, the Karnataka State Minorities Commission recommended in 2003 that the state government increase the representation of minorities in the state police force to 20 percent. In 2003 the Karnataka Commission urged the Home Ministry to examine how communal tensions could be defused by prompt action based on intelligence reports.

The legal system accommodates minority religions' personal status laws; there are different personal status laws for different religious communities. Religion-specific laws pertain in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. For example, Muslim personal status law governs many noncriminal matters involving Muslims, including family law, inheritance, and divorce. The BJP's political platform advocates a uniform civil code that would treat members of all religions alike; however, minority groups oppose a Uniform Civil Code and prefer to retain personal status laws for their religious communities.

The Government permits private religious schools, which can offer religious instruction, but it does not permit religious instruction in government schools. Since most of the students in the majority of Christian schools are Hindu, the schools have long restricted religious instruction on Christianity only to those students who are Christian. During the period covered by this report, the Supreme Court ruled that the Government can prescribe qualifications for admission, based on merit, to colleges that receive public funding, but colleges that do not receive government assistance may admit students according to their own criteria. Many Hindu sects have established their own schools, and the RSS has an entire school system. Some Muslims believe that Muslim madrassahs, some of which receive government aid, would be subject to stringent security clearance requirements under the government's interpretation. Muslims objected to further attempts by BJP/Hindutva proponents to limit their freedom and ability to practice their religious beliefs.

During the NDA government, which ended in May, some senior government officials advocated "saffronizing," or raising the profile of Hindu cultural norms and views in public education, which has prompted criticism from minority leaders, opposition politicians, academics, and advocates of secular values. The Government's National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) publishes textbooks that are uniformly used in government and private schools and are printed in various languages.

In 2002 the BJP Government announced its decision to rewrite existing NCERT history textbooks, asserting that, "history needs to be presented in a more refreshing and cogent manner." Secularists warned that the re-written "history" spread misinformation to support Hindu nationalist political aims, including false claims that the origins of Hinduism are purely within the country, and Indian Muslims and Christians are "foreigners." The BJP's decision was made without the input of the Central Advisory Board of Education, a panel of experts responsible for reviewing the quality of textbook and academic instruction. The board has not been convened in 5 years.

In January 2002,the National Human Rights Commission received a complaint asking the Commission to examine the printing of new history textbooks, which deleted references to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in 1948 by a member of the Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindutva organization banned following the assassination. In May 2002, the education ministers of 16 states walked out of a conference to protest the Hindutva bias of the new curriculum, while 3 leading scholars filed a petition with the Supreme Court challenging the publication of the new textbooks. However, the petition was turned down, and the new textbooks appeared in November 2002. The imposition of examination boards reflecting the content of the new textbooks forced schools to use them.

The Congress-led government that came to power in May pledged to "desaffronize" textbooks and curriculums nationwide and to restore the secular character of Indian education. In Delhi the Directorate of Education, in collaboration with the State Council of Educational Research and Training, prepared 47 new textbooks, stating they would be ready by June 30; other state governments are expected to do likewise. In June a panel constituted by NCERT reviewed these text books and recommended to the Human Resource Development (HRD) minister that they replace the current set, which the panel said had poor content, shoddy presentation, and significant amounts of irrelevant information. At the end of the period covered by this report, the HRD had not responded to the suggestion.

The Government maintains a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country, including books such as Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses," which contain material that governmental censors have deemed inflammatory. On March 24, 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 ban allegedly was supported by then Prime Minister Vajpayee. The Maharashtra state government also filed criminal charges against the book's author, the U.S. professor James Laine. In December 2003, the West Bengal government banned Taslima Nasreen's book "Split in Two" claiming that it could incite "enmity and communal disturbance" as proscribed under section 153A of the Indian Penal Code.

In August 2003, the Government asked documentary filmmakers to submit their films for pre-censorship prior to screening at the Mumbai International Film Festival. However, after extensive criticism and protest, the Government dropped the requirement, although certain films about the Gujarat violence ("Aakrosh" and "Final Solution") still were not shown. In response filmmakers held an independent and simultaneous festival in August 2003 to screen such films. In June, following an appeal to the Central Censor Board, the film "Aakrosh" received the censor certificate, which permits public screenings. However, in April the Indian censors refused a censor certificate to a commercial Hindi film called "Chand Buz Gaya", which has a character resembling the controversial Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi. The story involves a Muslim girl and Hindu boy in love with each other, who are separated by Hindu-Muslim riots that occur after a train arson incident. The producer has appealed the censor decision, but the appeal had not been heard by the end of the period covered by this report.

Some major religious holidays celebrated by various groups are considered national holidays, including Christmas (Christian), Eid and the anniversary of the death of Mohammed (Muslim), Lord Buddha's birthday (Buddhist), Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh), Holi (Hindu), and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain). In July 2003, the BJP government in Goa proposed removing Good Friday and another Christian holiday from the list of official holidays. After widespread protests from Christians, the measure was withdrawn in July 2003, and there was no further attempt to remove such holidays from the official list. However, in April the BJP-ruled government of Gujarat regulated Good Friday, making it a restricted holiday and choosing to schedule Gujarat University examinations on that day. 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.

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 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 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 the Hizbul Mujahideen. The Unlawful Activities Tribunal upheld the ban against SIMI in a March ruling. In January 2003, police in three different states arrested eight of its members, including former president of the SIMI Bhopal district unit, Khalid Naeem. He was later released on bail without being charged; at the end of the period of this report, no further legal action had been taken.

In 2001, the Government officially banned the Muslim group Deendar Anjuman for "fomenting communal tension" and actions "prejudicial to India's security." In April 2003, the Government extended the ban on Deendar Anjuman for another 2 years under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988 makes it an offense to use any religious site for political purposes or to use temples for harboring persons accused or convicted of crimes. While specifically designed to deal with Sikh places of worship in Punjab, the law applies to all religious sites.

Since 2000 Uttar Pradesh's "Religious Buildings and Places Bill" requires a permit endorsed by the state government before construction of any religious building can begin. The bill's supporters stated that its aim was to curb the use of Muslim institutions by Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups, but the measure remains a controversial political issue among religious groups in the northern part of the country.

Most religious groups from all of the communities oppose restrictions on building religious structures and continue to view them as infringements upon religious freedom.

Legislation in West Bengal requires any person who plans to construct a place of worship to seek permission from the district magistrate; anyone intending to convert a personal place of worship into a public one is also required to obtain the district magistrate's permission. Some Muslim groups report that they have not received permission to build new mosques, for example, in West Bengal. In March 2003, the Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP),an offshoot of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), an organization that 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 of such mosques includes the Gyan Vapi mosque in Varanasi, the Idgah mosque in Mathura, and the Ram temple grounds at the former Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. On September 20, 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 "trishul" or trident distribution program, which was popularized by the VHP during the last reporting period, has subsided. However, the symbolism of the three-pronged Hindu symbols, which were sometimes used as weapons, was discussed in a ceremony in Indore, Madhya Pradesh on March 1. While 700 persons participated in the rally organized by the Hindu extremist group Bajrang Dal, no tridents were distributed. In April 2003, the Rajasthan state government banned the distribution of trishuls in the state, but clarified that the order would not affect the use of trishuls in religious places and functions. On April 13, 2003, VHP General Secretary Togadia distributed the trishuls in defiance of the ban and was arrested. On April 21, 2003, he was released on bail, and no charges have been filed. There were no further trishul distributions in Rajasthan state during the period covered by this report.

The BJP, which led two coalition national governments from 1998 until May, is one of a number of offshoots of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS). Most BJP leaders, including former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, also are RSS members. 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 are ambivalent about this objective. 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.

The BJP did not include these RSS goals in the program of the coalition Government it led until May; however, some minority religious groups noted that the coming to power of the BJP coincided with an increase in complaints of discrimination against minority religious communities. These groups also claimed that BJP officials at state and local levels increasingly became unresponsive in investigating charges of religious discrimination and in prosecuting those persons responsible. Others note that during the election campaign, the BJP reached out to Muslims in swing districts and accentuated the Government's peace initiative with Pakistan.

The degree to which the BJP's nationalist Hindu agenda affected the country with respect to religious minorities during its rule varies depending on the region. State governments continue to attach a high priority to maintaining law and order and monitoring intercommunity relations at the district level. As a result, the central Government often is not the most important player in determining the character of relationships of various religious communities between each other and with the state.

Anti-conversion laws have been in effect in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa since the 1960s, and laws against forcible conversions exist also in Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. Chhattisgarh retained the anti-conversion law from Madhya Pradesh when it separated from that state. In 2002–03 the states of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat passed "anti-conversion" laws. Under both laws, those "forcing" or "al-

luring" individuals to convert are subject to criminal action. However, the Gujarat state government did not promulgate the rules and regulations necessary for implementation until May. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the law had not yet been used. 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 promoted such a law.

Since what constitutes forced conversions or allurement is not specified, human rights groups, Christian religious leaders, and Dalits have expressed concern that authorities will use these laws selectively in the future to shut down educational, medical, and other social services provided by Christian groups to Dalits and "tribals" (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system). However, the federal government can prevent states from taking action if there is a threat to national integrity and communal harmony, or if the law violates the basic spirit of the Constitution as written in its preamble.

The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion Act of October 2002 was initially declared by governor ordinance, which does not require approval by the state legislature. However, it was later ratified by the state legislature in December 2002. According to the act, those who attempt to convert individuals or groups from one religion to another using "false promises" and "allurements" are subject to prosecution, and all persons who "[take] part directly or indirectly in [a conversion] ceremony" must report the ceremony to the District Magistrate. Mandated punishments are greater for converting women, scheduled castes, and "tribals." As of the end of the period covered by this report, a petition questioning the constitutional validity of the act was under review by the state's high court. An ordinance repealing the law, issued on May 18, stopped its operation; however, the state legislature must approve the ordinance to turn the repeal into an act within 6 months from the date of issue, or the law will again come into effect. The Tamil Nadu legislative assembly has yet to give its formal approval for the repeal. As of May, no cases had been filed under the law, and following the poor performance of the governing party in the state in national parliamentary elections, the Chief Minister announced in May her intention to repeal the act; however, there had been no action by the end of the period covered by this report.

In March 2003, the state assembly of Gujarat passed the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act. The act requires those involved with a conversion to seek the permission, both before and after the conversion ceremony, of the district collector, who is the sole arbiter of the validity of each conversion. This act also requires the police to investigate cases of forced or induced religious conversions. As with the Tamil Nadu anti-conversion law, punishments are greater for women, scheduled castes, and "tribals." In April 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 rules and regulations for the act had not yet been published. The rules still had not been published by the end of the period covered by this report. In April 2003, a contingent of Dalits asked permission of the Vadodara Collector to convert to Buddhism under the new act; the collector had not given permission by the end of the period covered by this report. At the end of the period covered by this report, the law could not be implemented because the rules and regulations had not been drafted. State officials made no attempts to implement it in the absence of formal regulations.

In Punjab the Union Minister and General Secretary called for the state government to pass a law completely banning religious conversions. The move followed reports of large-scale conversions of Sikh Dalits. During the period covered by this report, the General Secretary took no further action.

In Chhattisgarh an anti-conversion law has been in force since the 1970s (at which time Chhattisgarh was a part of Madhya Pradesh). 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 later she was released on bail. During the period covered by this report, the high court had still not heard the case, and Sister Ekka remained free on bail.

In 2000, the Orissa government notified churches that religious 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.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 contains a provision requiring a monthly report from the state on the number of conversions. Before a conversion takes place, the district magistrate must be informed and the local police officer will conduct 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 the district magistrate denied permission for any conversions during the period covered by this report.

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.

The Gujarat State Higher Secondary Board, to which nearly 98 percent of schools in Gujarat belong, requires the use of certain textbooks in which Nazism is condoned. In the Standard 10 social studies textbook, the "charismatic personality" of "Hitler the Supremo" and the "achievements of Nazism" are described at length. The textbook does not acknowledge Nazi extermination policies or concentration camps except for a passing reference to "a policy of opposition towards the Jewish people and [advocacy for] the supremacy of the German race." The Standard 9 social studies textbook implies that Muslims, Christians, Parsees, and Jews are "foreigners."

On May 24, a Tamil Nadu Government unilateral order issued by the Registrar of the Dr. M.G.R. Medical University to the leading Christian missionary hospital in South Asia, Christian Medical College (CMC) of Vellore, directed the CMC 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 on August 14, 2003, to form a committee to look into the question of admissions procedures followed by minority education institutions. In the interim, The Supreme Court permitted the CMC to follow the admissions policy that it followed in the past, until the committee provided recommendations. The Tamil Nadu Government constituted a committee on March 19, which currently is debating the issue. The Tamil Nadu state government also has worked actively to strengthen Hindu institutions. For example, in March 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 Chief Minister Jayalalitha announced her intention to halt all such support.

Other southern states, which have had a history of support for their religious minorities, continued to demonstrate evidence of support for the Hindutva message. In addition to Tamil Nadu's anti-conversion laws, inclusion of BJP membership in Andhra Pradesh's ruling coalition, Karnataka's complacency in investigating crimes of religious violence, "antiminority" remarks of Kerala's Chief Minister Antony, and five instances of communal violence in Kerala since January 2002 signaled a growing acquiescence to the Hindutva agenda. In Karnataka Christian leaders recorded 50 incidents in 2002–03, ranging from destruction of church properties to physical abuse of ministers and converts, reportedly perpetrated by members of the Sangh Parivar. Although reported to the police, none of the incidents were investigated. State authorities did not deny that violence had occurred, but claimed these incidents did not represent any organized effort to deter evangelists.

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 southern part of the country. In recent years, Hindus have held many festivals at the site, which have alienated the local Muslim community.

Despite concerns expressed by religious minorities in the northern area of the country following attacks on them in Gujarat and Orissa, there were only a few isolated incidents of communal violence in this region during the period covered by this report (see Section III). The appeal of Hindu nationalism appeared to decrease in Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP-led state government was defeated in elections in early 2002, and replaced by a secular regional party.

In June 2002, the NHRC investigated the Gujarat February to May 2002 violence and 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." During the May to June 2003 trial of 21 Hindus accused of burning 12 Muslims and 2 Hindu workers alive in the Best Bakery, 41 of the 73 witnesses recanted their stories. On June 18, 2003, the 21 defendants were acquitted. The key eyewitness, Zahira Sheikh, a 19-year-old woman, claimed in July 2003, during a press conference in Mumbai, that she had testified falsely after BJP leaders repeatedly threatened her family. The NHRC dispatched its team to study the Best Bakery judgment in July 2003 and filed a petition for retrial outside Gujarat in the Supreme Court in August 2003. Subsequently, on April 12, the

Supreme Court ordered a new investigation and trial outside of Gujarat in the Best Bakery case, following the state government's submission of an affidavit to the Supreme Court on January 28.

In other cases, the 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. According to the Government of Gujarat's January 28 affidavit to the Supreme Court, 2,108 of the 4,256 cases registered in connection with the post-Godhra train burning violence have been filed as a "summary report," which means that the crime happened, but remains undeclared. In 2,130 cases, police have filed charges. The Government of Gujarat claimed in its affidavit to the Supreme Court that police have launched prosecutions against 5,384 persons in Ahmedabad city and 24,683 persons in the state as a whole, for cases related to the 2002 riots.

At the end of the period covered by this report, only 4 of these 2,130 cases completed trial in the lower level courts: the Best Bakery and 3 others. Two cases resulted in acquittals and two in convictions. In the two acquittals (Best Bakery and Mod) the Hindu offenders were exonerated in June and July 2003; while in two other cases, lower courts ruled in November 2003 and January to convict and sentence 13 Hindu offenders (after the Supreme Court's heard the Best Bakery case).

All of these cases are likely to be appealed to the Gujarat High Court and later to the Supreme Court. Final judgments may not be available for several years, and human rights activists and minority groups are skeptical that those guilty of the post-Godhra violence will be punished appropriately.

In March 2003, Gujarat BJP leader and former state Home Minister Haren Pandya was killed. In September 2003, Ahmedabad police charged approximately 80 Muslims including a local Muslim cleric with the murder. The case is scheduled for hearing in a Gujarat fast track POTA court in August. Police have not been able to locate 44 of the accused.

From February through May 2003, the Gujarat state government aggressively surveyed Christian families and agencies. The survey 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 surveys were carried out by police, often in the middle of the night, although the Gujarat High Court ruled in March 2003 that the survey was illegal. The surveys reportedly ceased during the period covered by this report.

On October 21, 2003, the Gujarat Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Karsan Patel, instructed 400 Dang tribal children, who were boarders at a Christian school in Subir run by the Navjyot Social Service Society, "to decide whether they want to live as Hindus or die as Christians." Patel made this statement at the "Ram Kartha" convention in Subir, which was attended by over 15,000 devotees of Ram, a popular incarnation of a Hindu god. Hindus were asked to reclaim the territory of their god in pamphlets circulated by the VHP at the convention.

There is no national law that bars 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 and is prohibited by India's Foreigners Act. This act strictly prohibits visitors who are in the country 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 and has a policy of expelling foreigners 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 the country 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 faced difficulties obtaining permission to return to the country for up to a decade after the event.

During the period covered by this report, no foreign missionaries were attacked. However, in April Father Jim Borst, a priest at the Mill Hill Mission in Srinagar, who had worked in India since 1963, was given a "Leave India Notice" from the Foreigner's Registration Office in Kashmir. Borst had served as the principal of St. Joseph's school in Baramulla and Burn Hall School in Srinagar throughout most of that time and engaged in other educational activities. The local authorities notified him that his visa would not be renewed, but did not offer any explanation; some Christian groups concluded the action was religiously motivated harassment. However, Borst remained in Srinagar during the period covered by this report, and his visa renewal request was still being processed.

In January 2003, a group of militant Hindus attacked U.S. missionary Joseph Cooper in Kerala. The police arrested nine suspects in the case; however, as of the end of the period covered by this report, charges had not been filed. The suspects were released after a few days of imprisonment; 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 in January 2003, on the day he was discharged from the hospital, reportedly because his tourist visa was incompatible with his missionary work. The Human Rights groups CHRO and Peoples Watch of Tamil Nadu in a joint fact-finding report on January 30, 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, in its findings, 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."

On June 30, 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.

Several Christian relief organizations also have been hampered by bureaucratic obstacles in getting visas renewed for foreign relief work. Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which limits overseas assistance to certain NGOs, including religiously affiliated groups.

The personal status laws of the 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. 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 as men.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 places limitations on interfaith marriages and specifies penalties, such as 10 years' imprisonment, for clergymen who contravene its provisions. Under the act, no marriage in which one party is a non-Christian may be celebrated in a church. However, the Indian Divorce Act does not bar interfaith marriages 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 the Government for indifference and inaction in the face of abuses committed by state and local authorities, as well as private citizens.

Weak enforcement of laws protecting religious freedom partly is due to an overburdened and corrupt judiciary. The legal system has many years of backlog, and all but the most prominent cases move slowly. Official failure to deal adequately with intra-group and intergroup conflict and with local disturbances in some places has abridged the right to religious freedom. A federal political system in which state governments hold jurisdiction over law and order contributed to the government's ineffectiveness in combating religiously based violence. The country's 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.

During the period covered by this report, no foreign missionaries were attacked. However, in April Father Jim Borst, a priest at the Mill Hill Mission in Srinagar, who had worked in India since 1963, was given a "Leave India Notice" from the Foreigner's Registration Office in Kashmir. In January 2003, a group of militant Hindus attacked American missionary Joseph Cooper in Kerala and in September 2002, youth members of the Bajrang Dal Party attacked South Koreans suspected of performing missionary work in Orissa.

The eastern part of the country presented a varied picture with regard to 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 sit-

uation remained relatively unchanged during the period covered by this report, despite the installation of a BJP-Biju Janata Dal (BJD) government which assumed power in 2000 and was re-elected this year. On September 9, 2003, a Hindu mob attacked construction workers building a church and looted construction material in Sudusudia village, Mayurbhanj district. 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.

On December 6, 2003, a peaceful Muslim protest in Hyderabad on the eve of the anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid turned violent when the group encountered a Hindu mob celebrating the mosque's destruction. Two Hindus were stabbed to death; police arrested approximately 35 persons from both communities, but charges had not been laid at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2003 the Minorities Commission of the Delhi state issued its annual report that claimed that the Christian community had become the target of a sustained misinformation and intimidation campaign. 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 Terrorist Organizations" list, and as a result, priests have been detained and asked to leave the area. The commission also reported that adequate space for Christian worship and burial of the dead was not provided by the Government. The commission did not issue a report during the period covered by this report.

In 2002, after Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat, Muslims and human rights activists alleged that the state reserve police sided with the attackers rather than with the victims (see Section III). Human rights activists reported that the Gujarat police received specific instructions not to take action to prevent a possible violent reaction to the February 2002, attack by Muslims on a train in Godhra carrying Hindus (see Section III). In some instances of Hindu aggression against Muslims, police and government officials abetted the violence, and at times security forces were responsible for abuses. Police sometimes assisted Hindu fundamentalists in committing violent acts.

The press and human rights activists have reported widely that police refused to come to the aid of Muslim victims, and in some cases even participated in attacks on Muslims and Muslim-owned businesses. Following the 2002 attack on the train in Godhra, the police 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 2002, the National Election Commission banned all religious processions in the state of Gujarat in connection with the December 12 election. The BJP party with its Hindutva brand of politics won the Gujarat election in a landslide with 126 of 181 assembly seats, winning those constituencies in the central part of the state that were most affected by the rioting. There were minor Hindu-Muslim skirmishes in Gujarat in Vadodara (September 2003 and February), Viramgam (November 2003), Ahmedabad (November 2003 and January), and Godhra (September 2003 and February). Seven persons (three Hindus and four Muslims) were killed in these skirmishes, but none died from police action. Fewer than 100 persons were injured in stone-throwing or stabbing incidents. The annual Hindu religious processions of Rath Yatra and the Muslim Tajia processions occurred peacefully in Ahmedabad, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, and Vadodara, during the period covered by this report. Furthermore, in March police in Gujarat detained at least 400 persons to prevent Hindu-Muslim clashes during a Muslim day of mourning; the same month, Muslims called off an annual religious march in the volatile town of Baroda to prevent potential clashes with Hindus during Muharram. 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.

In 2002, the Gujarat state Government appointed a retired Supreme Court Justice, G. T. Nanavati, to oversee a two-member judicial commission to investigate the February 2002 riots. The commission held hearings in various riot-affected districts of the state between May and November 2003; in May 2003, management of its investigation was criticized strongly by media and human rights activists as inadequate. In advance of a final report, Nanavati reportedly told media there was no evidence of police complicity; however, the commission reportedly received more candid testimony from victims. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the commission had not submitted its report. During the period covered by this report, the commission continued taking depositions in affected districts and cities of Gujarat. Victims in Ahmedabad testified before the commission without apparent constraint. The commission also warned the police during its hearings in September

2003 not to influence or terrorize the victims. Nevertheless, victims complained of covert pressure from Hindu rightist groups not to testify to the commission.

In its 2002 report on Gujarat, 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. The Government of Gujarat never requested a Central Bureau of Investigation Inquiry; it formed the Nanavati Commission instead.

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. None 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 of them were televised, by the end of the period covered by this report the state government had yet to secure a conviction of an accused Hindu.

However, 124 of the 126 persons arrested for the Godhra train arson, predominantly Muslims, were charged under the POTA, which allows for detention without charge for 6 months, summary trials, and the use of testimony exacted under duress. In May the UPA government announced its intention to repeal the POTA law; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, there had been no action in this regard. None of those arrested or charged under the POTA had been tried.

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.

During the period covered by this report, 2 lower courts in Gujarat convicted 13 Hindus in connection with the 2002 anti-Muslim violence, ostensibly due to the Supreme Court decision in the Best Bakery case in which it ordered a new investigation and retrial outside of the state. During the period covered by this report, four post-Godhra cases completed trial at the lowest level. In June and July 2003, offenders were acquitted, and in November 2003 and January, offenders were sentenced to prison. Reportedly after the Supreme Court began its hearing of Best Bakery in September 2003, lower courts in Gujarat tried to be more conscientious in dealing with Hindu offenders. The Supreme Court ordered a retrial (but not reinvestigation) in the case of Best Bakery, and it had not ruled on 10 other cases at the end of the period covered by this report.

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Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the country's only Muslim majority state, has been the focus of repeated armed conflict between India and Pakistan and internal fighting between security forces and Muslim militants, who demand that the state be given independence or 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 against the Muslim population, including execution-style killings, beatings, rapes, and other forms of physical abuse.

Government forces deny these allegations and assert that they target persons not on the basis of religion, but on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity. 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. In May militants kidnapped and then beheaded a 23 year-old Muslim in the Poonch area of J&K.

It is difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists predominantly are Muslim, and almost all the higher ranks as well as most of the lower ranks in the Indian forces stationed there are non-Muslims. On May 16, 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 Mohammed. The procession was held again in May.

In 2002, two unknown assailants captured Hindu and Sikh pilgrims at a Hindu temple in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. During security forces efforts to capture the assailants and free the captives, 30 persons were killed, including the attackers. Regional police officials have said that the case remains under investigation.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

On February 6, in an example of communal tension in Jagatsingpur District, Orissa, Hindu villagers 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; the women denied this, however. On May 6, the local police arrested six persons in connection with the incident, and the pastor and the eight women remain in sheltered housing.

In December 2003, the Maharashtra state Congress and Nationalist Congress parties banned the "Ghar Wapasi" ("Returning Home: Reconversion to Hinduism") program, which was organized by the VHP and 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 destroying the culture of Ram. The VHP shifted its program across the border to a village in BJP-ruled Gujarat and is set to attempt a reconversion drive in Kerala. 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. He continued by saying that having defeated the Congress Party, he expected "to undertake many more shuddhikaran (purification) programs." According to a media report, Togadiya claimed that the VHP planned to reconvert all Christians to Hinduism in BJP ruled states by 2005. He also said they plan to "expose the global Christian conspiracy of conversions." In March in the Jharsuguda district, 212 Christian tribals reconverted to Hinduism.

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 their Christianity. The family refused, and, following the intervention of the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission, it was given police protection from district headquarters. The family returned to its village in February; family members have not pressed charges.

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 were no developments in the case during the period covered by this report.

Hindu nationalist organizations frequently allege that Christian missionaries force Hindus, particularly those of lower castes, to convert to Christianity. Christians claim that the efforts of Hindu groups to "reconvert" Christians to Hinduism are coercive. In June 2003, a mob reportedly ransacked a church in Maharashtra's Chaari village, broke the building's crucifix, and placed a Hindu statue in its place. In March 2003, a Protestant church in Maharashtra was attacked by Hindu activists who had tried and failed to reconvert the church members to Hinduism. The Hindu mob smashed a wooden cross and placed a Hindu statue on the ground in front of the church. The local police chief, who ordered the Hindu villagers to remove their statue, was later criticized and forced to resign. Those responsible for the attack reportedly were arrested for 3 days and released on bail; there was no further information available during the period covered by this report.

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.

Abuse by Terrorist Organizations

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

Throughout the period covered by this report, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued to be a focus of violence. Pan-Islamic militants committed atrocities against Hindus and other Muslims, and security forces often used excessive force to suppress them. Civilians frequently are killed inadvertently. The killing of suspected militants, all of whom are Muslim, while in police custody is common. Militants also carried out several mass killings of Hindu villagers and violently targeted Pandits (Hindu Kashmiris) in an attempt to force Hindus to emigrate.

In the state of Arunachal Pradesh in July 2003, 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 a trial. The Chakhesang Baptist Church Council clarified that the Naga missionaries were appointed in 2001 by the Chakhesang Mission Society to do humanitarian work among the people of Tutsa tribe in Changlang and Tirap districts. 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 asking the community to accept Christianity. The NSCN and district authorities reportedly denied any such development.

Between December 2002 and March 2003, approximately 30 Hindus died in explosions in the Hindu-dominated areas of Ghatkopar, Parle, and in a commuter train in Mumbai. Police blamed Muslim students for these killings. As of the end of the period covered by this report, there were no arrests.

In March 2003, militants 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, militants unlawfully entered a house in Jammu and killed four members of a Hindu family. There was no legal action taken in these cases during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The NHRC and NCM continued to promote freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. Through their annual reports and investigations, they helped provide appropriate attention to human rights problems in the country and, where possible, encouraged judicial resolution. 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. 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 reopened the case and ordered a new investigation and retrial.

During the period covered by this report, 2 lower courts in Gujarat convicted 13 Hindus in connection with the 2002 anti-Muslim violence, ostensibly due to the Supreme Court decision in the Best Bakery case in which it ordered a new investigation and retrial outside of the state. During the period covered by this report, four post-Godhra cases completed trial at the lowest level. In June and July 2003, offenders were acquitted, and in November 2003 and January, offenders were sentenced to prison. Reportedly after the Supreme Court began its hearing of Best Bakery in September 2003, lower courts in Gujarat attempted to be more conscientious in dealing with Hindu offenders. The Supreme Court ordered a retrial (but not reinvestigation) in the case of Best Bakery, and it had not ruled on 10 other cases at the end of the period covered by this report.

The NHRC and the NCM also pursued unilateral action not prompted by a specific complaint or legal demand, directing the central Government and Gujarat state government to take corrective action in regard to the February and March 2002 violence. As a direct result of this warning, the central Government created a special compensation package for the victims of the violence in Gujarat. The NHCR issued directives against the Gujarat state government in April and June 2002 concerning the communal riots of February 2002. The directives recommended that certain Gujarat cases be entrusted to the Central Bureau of Investigation, encouraged support for the role of NGO's, and urged police reform.

On September 15, 2003, the Special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Court in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, convicted Dara Singh and 12 accomplices of murdering 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 received life imprisonment. Initial hearings on their appeal to the Orissa High Court began in October 2003. After passing the death sentence, the Sessions Court referred the case to the High Court for confirmation. Singh also is facing trial for two other 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.

In October 2003, on the occasion of the feast of Diwali, a Vatican official invited Hindus to promote with Catholics the defense of human rights and peace throughout the world.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Animosities within and between the country's religious communities have roots that are centuries old, and these tensions at times were exacerbated by poverty, class, and ethnic differences and have erupted into periodic violence throughout the country's 57-year history. The Government makes some effort, not always successfully, to prevent these incidents and to restore communal harmony; (see Section II) 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.

During the period covered by this report, attacks on religious minorities persisted. In 2003–04, diplomatic observers estimated that there were 17 reported attacks against the Muslim community and 30 against the Christian community. In the previous year, 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 as reflected in the previous reporting period. Some of these attacks were motivated by economic issues or arose in a context of existing nonreligious disputes; others were purely religious in motivation.

Within the Indian context, the phrase "communal violence" generally is understood to mean Hindu-Muslim conflict and the possibility of retaliation and serious riots. Hindus and Muslims continue to feud over the existence of mosques constructed several centuries ago on three sites where Hindus believe that temples stood previously. The potential for renewed Hindu-Muslim violence in connection with this controversy remains considerable.

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 vacate a ban on religious activity at the site, and as of April, the Prime Minister promised to continue with plans to build the temple on the site of the razed Muslim mosque. 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 for fear their campaign to build the new temple could lead to violence. The Lucknow High Court ordered the federally run Archaeological Survey of India to excavate the 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 the new government announced that it would await the verdict of the courts, while encouraging negotiations between the parties to the dispute for an amicable settlement. Excavations were ongoing as of the end of the period covered by this report.

Muslims continued to experience other intimidation tactics. Muslims reportedly could not work, reside, or send their children to schools in Hindu dominated areas. Signs were displayed stating "Hindus only" and "Muslim free area." Prohibitions on the Muslim call to prayer were also reported.

There were no reported incidents of intercommunity strife in the state of Chhattisgarh or Goa during the period covered by this report.

On May 2, 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 whom were members of the National Democratic Front, an Islamic organization. Reportedly 400 Muslim families fled the area in fear of Hindu retaliation.

In Assam, where the population is increasing rapidly, the issue of Bangladeshi migrants (who generally are Muslim) long has been sensitive among the Assamese (predominantly Hindu) population, which considers itself increasingly outnumbered. On December 23, 2003, VHP leader Praveen Togadia announced that within 6 to 8 months, he would mobilize a campaign against "Bangladeshi infiltrators."

Bangladeshi Muslim migrants who come to the country generally are relegated to low paying jobs and a low social status. They face harassment and discrimination that stems from their status as undocumented labor.

On December 4, 2003, a Muslim driver was killed by Sikhs in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. Muslim youths reportedly had torn a Sikh religious flag, prompting the altercation. At the end of the period of this report, there had been no arrests and no apparent police investigation.

In February 2003, in Madhya Pradesh, a Hindu group began to demand greater access to a religious site at which they had been restricted to one religious ceremony per year since 1996. Two persons died in rioting after Hindu extremists stormed the Bhojshala monument that Muslims claim as the site of a 15th century mosque. In response to Hindu demands, the Archeological Survey of India permitted Hindus to worship on Tuesdays while Muslims continued to have access every Friday.

Some of the most severe communal violence in the country's history occurred in Gujarat in February 2002. Two train cars were set on fire, and 58 passengers killed, including 15 children and 25 women, according to Gujarat state officials. Over the next 3 months, Hindu mobs in Gujarat, allegedly angered by the attack on the train and incited and organized by members of the Sangh Parivar, destroyed Muslim businesses, raped Muslim women, and killed an estimated 2,000 Muslims. In addition 100,000 Muslims were displaced forcibly 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.

Initially, the Government announced a probe only of the Muslim attack on the train; however, after criticism by opposition parties and the media, the Government expanded the probe to include the violence after the attack on the train.

The effects of the riots continued into the following year. In July filmmaker Gopal Menon was assaulted for his work on a film documenting the 2002 anti-Muslim riots. In December 6 persons died and 24 were injured in Hyderabad after clashes between Hindu hardliners celebrating the 11th anniversary of the razing of a mosque and protesting Muslims; police opened fire to control the mobs.

Human rights groups expressed concern that those responsible for the Gujarat violence may never be tried or convicted for their crimes. They charged that although the Government initially arrested thousands following the attacks, most of those arrested were acquitted, released on bail with no further action taken, or simply released. In addition even when cases did reach trial, Muslim victims often faced biased prosecutors. Judges and lawyers representing Muslim victims also have faced harassment and threats.

Victims of the Gujarat riots claimed that Hindu nationalists sabotaged efforts to prosecute Hindus involved in the riots. 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, a fact-finding team visited Gujarat to document the effect of communal riots on women. The team consisted of women from various women's organizations. The report stated that Muslim women had been subjected to "unimaginable, inhuman, barbaric" sexual violence during the riots, suffering rape, gang rape, and molestation. Due to societal stigma in the country, few women that have been raped file charges. The Supreme Court has shown increased concern over this circumstance, and in January the court reopened a 2002 rape case in which 14 members of the victim's family also were murdered. The case included charges that the Gujarat police intimidated the victim from identifying her attackers. A CBI investigation starting in January resulted in the arrest of 15 persons including senior BJP and VHP officials and police officers. At the end of the period covered by this report, the case was ongoing.

In 2002, an attack on the Swaminarayan Hindu Temple in Gujarat left 40 persons dead before security forces stormed the temple. The Government responded swiftly by deploying approximately 3,000 army personnel to dispel a strike and protest march called by the VHP. Critics of the Government noted that had the Government acted as quickly following the Gujarat violence, many deaths could have been prevented. In November 2002, security forces ended a siege by suspected Muslim militants of 2 Hindu temples; 13 persons were killed in the raid, including 9 civilians, a soldier, a policeman, and the 2 assailants.

In 2002, local Hindus reportedly attacked Muslims who tried to construct a mosque in Andhra Pradesh and injured nine persons. The local BJP president was arrested for complicity in the attack, but he was not charged with any crime and was released from custody; the case was still pending as of the end of the period covered by this report.

Throughout the period covered by this report, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued to be a focus of violence. Pan-Islamic militants committed atrocities against

Hindus and other Muslims, and security forces often used excessive force to suppress them. Civilians frequently were killed inadvertently. The killing of suspected militants, all of whom are Muslim, while in police custody was common. Militants also carried out several mass killings of Hindu villagers and violently targeted Pandits (Hindu Kashmiris) in an attempt to force Hindus to emigrate.

According to the report of the Home Ministry from 2002–03, approximately 56,246 Pandit families fled their homes in J&K due to the violence between 1990 and 1993. 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, 238 families also were still in Delhi's 14 camps. The remainder still was displaced, but was living outside of the camps in Jammu and Delhi.

The Pandit community criticized bleak physical, educational, and economic conditions in the camps and feared that a negotiated solution giving greater autonomy to the Muslim majority might threaten its own survival in J&K as a culturally and historically distinctive group.

Targeted killings against the Sikh community, the most recent of which were in 2001, increased fears among remaining religious minorities in Kashmir's and prompted many Sikhs, especially young persons to leave the Valley. In Kashmir the militant group Lashkar-e-Jabbar ordered Muslim women to dress in burqas, Hindu women to wear bindis, and Sikh women to wear identifying saffron headscarves. Some women followed these orders when they were first issued; however, compliance since has declined. There were a number of violent incidents that are believed to have been carried out by Muslim militants.

The slaughter of cows, which are considered holy and are worshipped by Hindus, sometimes has led to violence. 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.

In 2002, five Dalits were lynched by VHP activists in Haryana. Reportedly, the action was stimulated by accusations of cow slaughter. In its investigation, the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights alleged police complicity in the attacks, and in October 2002 the NHRC called for the Haryana state government to initiate action against the policemen involved. In December 2003, the Haryana government provided employment to the victims' next of kin and paid approximately $10,000 (RS 500,000) to each family, but it took no disciplinary action against the policemen involved.

In 2002, Shiv Sena leader Balasaheb Thackeray called upon his followers to form Hindu suicide squads to combat Muslim extremists. The Maharashta 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.

In a February report (on the CBCI's web site), the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) stated that "incidents of intimidation, physical assaults and threats to eliminate members of the Christian community in several places have been on the increase." Also in February, the All India Catholic Council stated, "International agencies have recorded, quoting national police sources, over 600 cases of violence against the Christian community in India in 2003 alone. The Catholic Union records a case every 36 hours, including assault, attacks on churches, burning of copies of the Holy Bible, tonsuring of Christians, and fatal assaults. In most cases, these have been traced to various frontal organizations of the Sangh Parivar, including the RSS, the Bajrang Dal, the VHP and the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram." However, diplomatic sources indicate that there were 30 cases of attacks against Christians during the period covered by this report compared to 69 in the previous reporting period.

In Madhya Pradesh, intercommunity strife is relatively uncommon. However, Hindu fundamentalists of the Bajrang Dal in Madhya Pradesh accused Catholic priests of the rape and murder of a teenage girl on March 3. The following day, Bajrang Dal activists attacked a group of church workers who were taking the girl's body to the hospital for an autopsy and beat a Catholic priest into unconsciousness. In another case, there was a violent public demonstration against Christians in January in Jhabua district, during which a Hindu activist was killed. This demonstration was in response to the January 11 case of a 9-year-old tribal girl who was raped, killed, and found in a Christian school in Jhabua. Hindus accused a Christian priest of committing the crime. Following a VHP protest outside the school, local police took the priest and seven school staff members into protective custody. They were released several days later when Manhohar Jadhav, a Hindu, confessed to the crime. This sequence of events prompted communal violence in nearby

Amkhut village. A Hindu, Arjun Das, was killed, and a Hindu mob reportedly chanted anti-Christian slogans and attacked a church. Subsequently, 12 Christians were arrested for violence; however, there were no arrests of Hindu activists.

On January 16, a mob of militant Hindus attacked the Church of North India in the village of Amhkut. They burned the houses of several Christian families; many Christians were beaten, and a total of 3 churches and 20 houses belonging to Christians were damaged badly. The violence spread to Alirajpur where VHP and BJP militants attacked more Christians and their property, and on January 17, 50 Hindu extremists hurled stones at the Catholic Bhuri Mati Mission Center at Ranapur.

In November 2003, VHP and Bajrang Dal fundamentalist movements attacked churches and assaulted a nun. On November 21, 2003, Hindu militants burned a Catholic church in Deogarh, west Orissa. The previous day, in front of the residence of the district governor, gangs burned Bibles and other Christian literature. In Rajamunda village, they broke into a church and raped a nun. These persons also went to Amulpani village to question the conversion of four Hindus who had become Catholics. In Jhareikela they damaged the home of a Protestant pastor and destroyed Christian books. 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 are suspected to have made the attack.

In Jharkhand on November 9, 2003, RSS chief KS Sudarshan accused Christian missionaries of launching a campaign of converting the poor to reduce the Hindu majority population intentionally. In January during an RSS meeting in Orissa, Sudarshan said that a prejudiced policy of treating Muslims and Christians like minorities should be ended. In March Sudarshan said there were no minorities in the country as 99 percent of the persons living there have their ancestors belonging to the land. He added that the only two communities that can be considered minorities are Parsis and Jews. He also said, "India is a multicultural nation, but it has one soul. It has different civilizations, people with different lifestyles, eating habits, and languages, but one bhav (inherent feeling)."

On October 26, 2003, in the city of Roorkey in Uttaranchal, an 80-person mob attacked Christians participating in a prayer meeting. A month later, a Hindutva group burned an effigy of Jesus in the state of Orissa.

In October 2003, Father Swami, Archdiocese of Bangalore, was found dead in Karnataka after being beaten in regard to a land dispute. Months earlier he had been threatened by Hindu fundamentalists.

Hindu nationalists continued an ideological campaign to limit access to Christian institutions and discourage or, in some cases, prohibit conversions to Christianity. For example, in July 2003, the VHP accused Pope John Paul II of interfering in the affairs of the country by calling on bishops to ignore the country's anti-conversion laws.

Between January and June 2003, Christian leaders in Karnataka recorded 50 incidents, ranging from destruction of church properties to physical abuse of ministers and converts. Reportedly, members of the Sangh Parivar perpetrated these incidents. 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. On July 31, 2003, students and staff members of a Bible school in Dabwali, Haryana, were attacked during prayer by a mob of 250 persons, most of whom were members of the VHP. The assailants accused the 25-member student body of converting persons in the area; they burned Bibles and Christian literature, vandalized the school, and beat students.

On June 8, the Hindu fundamentalist Jagran Manch organization and BJP activists disrupted a Christian religious meeting at St. John's College in Agra, and on June 14, villagers of Mainpure, Uttar Pradesh set a church on fire to protest mass conversion in the area.

In April 2003, Hindu extremists in Gujarat vandalized a municipality-run health care dispensary that had been destroyed in the earthquake of 2001, rebuilt with the support of a Christian organization, and was scheduled to be dedicated by former state minister Kirtisinh Rana. A stone with the names of the donors was destroyed, and graffiti of Hindutva slogans was painted on the walls.

On March 9, 2003, Hindu extremists reportedly started a fire that destroyed 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.

In 2002, armed men threw bombs into a Catholic church during midnight mass in West Bengal. A priest and 14 others were injured in the attack. Seven persons

were arrested, but there were no convictions. Police alleged that the suspects were part of a local gang and were not members of a Hindu organization. The attackers were reportedly motivated by a perception that Christians were encouraging conversions of Hindus.

In 2002, the Gujarat Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Karsan Patel, threatened Dang tribals, "to decide whether they want to live as Hindus or die as Christians." These comments were not repeated during the period covered by this report.

In 2002, following the outbreak of communal riots in Gujarat, Christian organizations reported that Christian institutions and functionaries in the state also were attacked. These Christian organizations blame the RSS and the VHP for ransacking and burning Christian missions in Sanjeli and Dhudhia, although these charges were not otherwise confirmed.

In 2002, a church in Managalore, Karnataka was attacked by approximately 60 persons protesting alleged attempts to convert local Hindus to Christianity. In 2001, in Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh, 43 Christian tombs in the local burial ground were destroyed.

Christian missionaries have been operating schools and medical clinics for many years in tribal areas. Tribals (who have no caste status) and Dalits (who are at the lowest end of the caste system) occupy the very lowest position in the social hierarchy. However, they have made socioeconomic gains as a result of the missionary schools and other institutions, which, among other things, have increased literacy among low-caste and non-caste persons.

Some higher-caste Hindus resent these gains. They blame missionaries for the resulting disturbance in the traditional Hindu social order, as better educated Dalits, tribals, and members of the lower castes no longer accept their disadvantaged status as readily as they once did. Some Hindu groups fear that Christians may try to convert large numbers of lower-caste Hindus, using economic or social welfare incentives.

Some upper-caste Hindus, the membership base of the BJP and RSS, fear that this development may destroy the rigid caste hierarchy. Many acts of violence against Christians stem from these fears. This fear was highlighted by an August 15, 2003, statement by then Prime Minister Vajpayee who stated, "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 refer 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 taps into a longstanding fear of foreign religious domination. Several Christian-affiliated (in many cases, nonevangelical) international relief agencies stated that during the year, their work in delivering services to the poor became considerably more difficult due to threats, increased bureaucratic obstacles, and, in some cases, physical attacks on their field workers by Hindu extremists.

In 2002, a new cable television station, promoting Catholic values, was launched in Kerala, but several cable television station operators in Kerala and neighboring states reportedly initially refused to make the station's programming available to viewers. However, as of the end of the period covered by this report, the station continued to be widely available.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 places limitations on interfaith marriages and specified penalties, such as 10 years' imprisonment, for clergymen who contravene its provisions. Interfaith couples often experienced condemnation and violence from relatives and Sangh Parivar members, who object to the unions.

On February 5, 2003, in Gujarat, a Catholic, Anthony Rebello, and a Hindu, Reema Sompura, were married in a legal Hindu marriage ceremony, but due to strong family and Bajrang Dal opposition, the couple was forced into hiding. Search warrants were issued against them when Sompura's mother entered a complaint against Rebello. On April 28, 2003, Sompura testified in court that she went with Rebello willingly. On April 29, 2003, outside of the court, VHP and Bajrang Dal members attacked the couple. Sompura, who was pregnant, was kicked in the stomach, and the baby subsequently was aborted. The couple was separated at the police station, where Rebello was beaten further by VHP and Bajrang Dal members, and Sompura was transferred to her family. No action has been taken against VHP or the Bajrang Dal members for this attack.

The country's caste system historically has been an integral part of Hinduism. Hinduism delineates clear social strata, assigning highly structured religious, cultural, and social roles, privileges, and restrictions to each caste and subcaste. Members of each caste (and frequently each subcaste) are expected to fulfill a specific

set of duties (known as dharma) in order 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.

Despite efforts by reform-minded modern leaders to eliminate the discriminatory aspects of caste, societal, political, and economic pressures continue to ensure its widespread practice. The country's 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. However, in 2002, five Dalit youths were killed by a mob, reportedly led by members of the VHP after reports of cow slaughtering in the state of Haryana. The local leader of the VHP stated that he had no regrets over the incident and that the life of a cow was worth more than that of five Dalits. A police investigation resulted in 30 arrests; however, there was no further action by the end of the period covered by this report, but those arrested remained in prison.

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 they have achieved the desired effect and should be modified, while others strongly argue that they should be continued, as the system has not 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.

Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs historically have rejected the concept of caste, despite the fact that most of them descended from low caste Hindu families and continue to suffer the same social and economic limitations of low caste Hindus. Low caste Hindus who convert to Christianity lose their eligibility for affirmative action programs. Those who become Buddhists, Jains, or Sikhs do not, as the Constitution groups members of those faiths with Hindus and specifies that the Constitution shall not affect "the operation of any existing law or prevent the state from making any law providing for social welfare and reform" of these groups. In some states, there are government jobs reserved for Muslims of low caste descent.

Members of religious minorities and lower castes criticized the 2001 census as discriminating against them. They claim that they frequently were not allowed to register their correct caste status. Census results are used to apportion government jobs and higher education slots to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

In 2001, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India strongly criticized the census for "discriminating against weaker sections of society" by maintaining that Scheduled Castes may only be Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist. The National Council of Churches in India also protested the census. Despite the fact that Christianity does not recognize caste, Christian leaders recognize that society in general still does. They allege that the 50 percent of the country's Christians who are of Dalit origin may be disadvantaged by not being allotted shares of jobs and places in education under the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes provisions of the Constitution.

Dalit converts to Christianity claim that societal discrimination against them continues, even within the Christian community. One indicator of the continued slowness of economic and social upward mobility of Dalit Christians is that, of the 180 Catholic bishops in the country, only 5 are 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 protested the census issue vigorously.

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 is not enforced effectively and criminalizes 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 Children Development has 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 are amicable among the substantial majority of citizens. There are efforts at ecumenical understanding that bring religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. The annual Sarva Dharma Sammelan (All Religious Convention) and the frequently held Mushairas (Hindu-Urdu poetry sessions) are some events that help 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. After episodes of violence against Christians, Muslim groups have protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organizations issued public statements condemning the violence in Gujarat, and the Archbishop of Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat, participated in a peace march in April 2003.

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 continued to promote religious freedom through contact with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates regularly meet with religious leaders and report on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

During the period covered by this report, Embassy and Consulate officials met with important leaders of all of the significant minority communities. For example, the Calcutta Principal Officer met a section of church leaders in Orissa, including the President of the All India Christian Council, Orissa Chapter on April 1 to discuss reports of ongoing harassment of converts and missionaries. The Consulate in Calcutta continued to conduct Iftar and Madrassa exchange programs. Embassy officials also continued an active program of outreach and engagement with leaders of the country's Muslim communities.

The NGO and missionary communities in the country are extremely active on questions of religious freedom, and mission officers meet with local NGOs regularly.

The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials publicly expressed regret over the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, extended condolences to the victims, and urged all parties to resolve their difference peacefully. In addition the U.S. Agency for International Development office provided funding for an NGO program designed to assist internally displaced persons in Gujarat. U.S. officials from the Consulate General in Mumbai traveled to Ahmedabad within days of the start of the violence in Gujarat, to meet with officials and private citizens about the violence and continued to have meetings during the period covered by this report. 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.

Officials from the Consulate in Chennai were active in assisting missionary Joseph Cooper following the attack on him by Hindu extremists in 2003. The Consulate in Chennai also organized a roundtable on June 23, 2003, to promote better understanding between the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities. The Chennai Consulate also continued to reach out to the Muslim community through Iftar parties and the International Visitor/Madrassa programs.

Finally, U.S. officials have continued to engage state officials on the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion laws.

MALDIVES

The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion, and the Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens must be Muslims. The practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited by law. Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practice their religion if they do so in private and do not encourage citizens to participate. The President is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." The Government observes Shari'a (Islamic law).

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 and 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 from India, and its population is approximately 280,000.

The population is an ethnic mixture predominately of South Indians, Sinhalese, and Arabs. Several hundred members of an Indian trading community on the capital island of Male practice the Shia branch of Islam; the rest of the population is Sunni. Non-Muslim foreigners in the Maldives, 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 religion 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 citizens be Muslims. Muslim holidays are generally national holidays. Foreign residents are allowed to practice their religion if they do so privately and do not encourage citizens to participate.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom repeatedly has stated that no religion other than Islam should be allowed in the country, and the Home Affairs Ministry announced special programs to safeguard and strengthen religious unity. The Government has established a 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 to ensure adequate theological qualifications.

The President must be a Sunni Muslim and under the Constitution is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Cabinet ministers also are required to be Sunni Muslims. Members of the People's Majlis (Parliament) must be Muslim; however, they are not required to be Sunni Muslims.

The Government observes Shari'a. Civil law is subordinate to Shari'a, which is applied in situations not covered by civil law as well as in certain acts such as divorce and adultery. 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 only registers 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 and 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 loss of citizenship from conversion to a non-Islamic religion. Islamic instruction is a mandatory part of the school curriculum, and the Government funds the salaries of instructors of Islam.

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 a resident embassy in the Maldives; the U.S. Ambassador in Colombo, Sri Lanka, also is accredited to the Government in Male. 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 permits the practice of all religions; however, it describes the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it does not establish Hinduism as the state religion. The Government generally has not interfered with the practice of other religions; however, there are some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Proselytization is prohibited. Members of minority religions occasionally report police harassment. Authorities restricted public celebrations by the Tibetan community on the Dalai Lama's birthday.

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 a total area of 54,363 square miles, and its population is approximately 24.7 million. Hindus constitute approximately 81 percent of the population; Buddhists, 11 percent; Muslims, 4.2 percent; and practitioners of Kirant (an indigenous animist religion) and others, 3.6 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, which is higher than the official government estimate. Press reports indicate that 170 Christian churches operate in Kathmandu alone.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and permits the practice of all religions; although the Government generally has not interfered with the practice of other religions, 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 operated freely. Missionary schools are among the most respected institutions of secondary education in the country; 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.

Some religious holidays, most of them Hindu, are recognized as national holidays. These are Mahashivaratri, Buddha Jayanti, Falgun Purnima, Krishna Asthami, Dasain, and Tihar.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The law prohibits converting others and proselytizing; these activities are punishable with fines, imprisonment or, in the case of foreigners, expulsion from the country.

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. On February 14, 2003, three Nepali men were arrested in Pyuthan District and charged with proselytization. A case was filed against them in Pyuthan District Court on February 28, 2003. Charges were dropped, and the three men were released on September 11, 2003.

The Government investigates reports of proselytizing. Nongovernmental groups or individuals are free to file charges of proselytizing against individuals or organizations. Such a case was filed with the Supreme Court in 1999 by a private attorney against the Adventist Development and Relief Agency and the United Missions to Nepal, an umbrella Protestant development group. The case was dismissed by the Court in 2002.

Tibetan Buddhists have faced various restrictions on their celebrations. Since mid-2001, local authorities generally have restricted celebration of Tibetan religious festivals to private property. On July 6, 2003, celebrations planned in Kathmandu to mark the Dalai Lama's birthday were confined to a monastery compound. Celebrations to mark the Tibetan New Year, or Losar, on February 22 were largely restricted to a monastery compound. Plans to mark December 10, 2001, as the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's Nobel Prize, to be held at the Boudhanath Stupa, the center of Tibetan religious life in Nepal, were canceled at the request of the authorities. In 2002, police prevented a Tibetan cultural program planned at a public venue from taking place. The program was to have honored the 13th birthday of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama to be the 11th Panchen Lama.

In 2002, Government pressure forced organizers to cancel three separate public events planned to celebrate the Dalai Lama's birthday. In 2002, police closed a press conference held by a local Buddhist community group to protest statements by followers of the Dorje Shugden deity that criticized the Dalai Lama. In September 2002, the Tibetan Democracy Day religious gathering was interrupted by police. In March 2003, Tibetans celebrating the New Year were forbidden by police from displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama. In previous years, a portrait of the Dalai Lama had been carried around the stupa as part of the religious ceremonies.

In 2002, the Cabinet decided that Muslim religious schools, or madrassas, 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 in participating in the Hajj.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste; however, in practice members of the lowest castes often are prohibited from entering Hindu temples. Persons not of South Asian ethnicity often are restricted from entering many Hindu temples. The Press and Publications Act prohibits the publication of materials that create animosity among persons of different castes or religions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Reportedly, on July 26, 2003, Buddhist and Hindu villagers attacked members of a small Christian house church in the northern part of the country, resulting in hospitalization for at least one church member and the destruction of houses and cornfields belonging to Christians. Reportedly, Buddhist authorities in the village repeatedly had asked Christians to give up their faith, and when they refused, the Buddhists joined with Hindu villagers to attack the Christians. In a separate incident, a Nepali evangelist allegedly witnessed an attack in mid-June 2003 on a newly built Christian church in Beldangi, Jhapa district. These reports cannot be confirmed.

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 have been scattered reports of Maoist insurgents attacking Hindu temples and harassing Hindu priests during the reporting period. On June 19, unconfirmed local media reported that Maoist insurgents banned worship in the Khadgadevi temple in Maidikot, Dhading District, employing threats and intimidation to enforce the ban.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The 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 Buddha's birthday is a national holiday.

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. During late 2001, Muslim leaders complained that Hindu fundamentalists increased their campaigns of anti-Islamic pamphleteering and graffiti. 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 such castes remains widespread and persistent, despite the Government's efforts to protect the rights of disadvantaged castes. Hindu religious tradition has prohibited members of the lowest caste and other religions from entering certain temples. In a speech in August 2001, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba stressed that caste-based discrimination is illegal. Since then, temple access for members of the lowest castes has improved in many locations. Draft legislation aimed at improving conditions for members of the lowest castes is pending; however, as Parliament did not sit during the reporting period, there has been no further legislative action.

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, and other religious groups. The Embassy monitors closely religious freedom and raises the issue with the Government when appropriate.

PAKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and states that adequate provisions are to be made for minorities to profess and practice their religions freely; however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. The country is an Islamic republic; Islam is the state religion. Islam also is a core element of the national ideology; the country was created to be a homeland for Muslims, although its founders did not envisage it as an Islamic state. Religious freedom is "subject to law, public order, and morality;" accordingly, actions or speech deemed derogatory to Islam or to its Prophet are not protected. In addition the Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam and imposes some elements of Koranic law on both Muslims and religious minorities.

There were no significant changes in the Government's treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report. The Government fails in many respects to protect the rights of religious minorities. This is due both to public policy and to the Government's unwillingness to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith. The accretion of discriminatory religious leg-

islation has fostered an atmosphere of religious intolerance, which contributes to acts of violence directed against non-Muslims and members of minority Muslim groups. There were instances in which the Government failed to intervene in cases of societal violence directed at minority religious groups. The lack of an adequate government response contributed to an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities. However, the Government promotes religious tolerance, does not encourage sectarian violence, and, at the highest levels, specifically condemned sectarian extremism during the period covered by this report. It has banned all significant sectarian extremist groups and arrested hundreds of members of these groups suspected of violent attacks. Parties and groups with religious affiliations have been known to target minority groups.

The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an alliance of religious parties that includes both Sunni and Shi'a groups, leads the opposition in the federal Parliament, holds a majority in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Provincial Assembly, and is part of the ruling coalition in Baluchistan. The MMA has called for strict adherence to Shari'a law. Minority groups claim the MMA's outspoken calls for Islamic laws and morals have made the social climate more hostile to persons of minority Muslim sects and other religions.

Specific government policies that discriminate against religious minorities include the use of the "Hudood" Ordinances, which apply different standards of evidence to Muslims and non-Muslims and to men and women for alleged violations of Islamic law; list specific legal prohibitions against Ahmadis practicing their religion; and incorporate blasphemy laws that have been used to target reformist Muslims, Ahmadis, Christians, and Hindus. Both the Hudood Ordinances and the blasphemy laws have been abused, in that they are often used against persons to settle personal scores. Approximately 1,600 to 2,100 persons were imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinances as of the end of the reporting period.

More than 100 persons were detained for blasphemy offenses as of the end of the reporting period. 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. According to the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement (CLAAS), 14 new blasphemy cases were registered during the period covered by this report. Several high profile blasphemy cases remained unresolved because the courts repeatedly postponed hearings, and the Government did not press the courts to proceed. However, during the period covered by this report, the Lahore High Court overturned a few lower court convictions and acquitted several blasphemy defendants.

Relations between different religious groups frequently were tense, acts of sectarian and religious violence continued, and over 100 deaths were attributed to sectarian violence during the period covered by this report. The worst religious violence was directed against the country's Shi'a minority, which continued to be disproportionately the victims of individual and mass killings.

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 closely monitored the status of religious freedom and acted when appropriate. In addition senior embassy officials expressed concern about the Shahbaz Bhatti and Younis Sheikh cases with senior government officials. Embassy officials encouraged government officials to pursue aggressive investigations of incidents involving the bombing of places of worship. The U.S. Government also discussed specific cases involving the abuse of religious minorities with the Government. Additionally, the Embassy assisted local and international human rights organizations to follow up on specific cases involving religious minorities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 310,527 square miles, and its population is approximately 150 million. According to the most recent census, taken in 1998, an estimated 96 percent of the population are Muslim; 2.02 percent are Hindu; 1.69 percent are Christian; and 0.35 percent are "other" (including Ahmadis). The majority of Muslims in the country are Sunni. An estimated 10 percent of the Muslim population is Shi'a, including some 550,000 to 600,000 Ismailis. Most Ismailis in the country are followers of the Aga Khan; however, an estimated 50,000 Ismailis, known as Bohras, are not.

Religious minority groups believe that they are underrepresented in government census counts and claim that they represent 10 percent of the population, rather than the census figure of 4 to 5 percent. Official and private estimates of their numbers can differ significantly. The most recent official census estimates place the

number of Hindus at 2.44 million, Christians at 2.09 million, and the Ahmadi population at 286,000. The figure for the Ahmadis is inherently inaccurate because they have been boycotting census and registration for electoral rolls since 1974 when they were declared non-Muslims. The Hindu and Christian communities each claim memberships of approximately 4 million. Estimates for the remaining communities are less contested and place the total number of Parsis (Zoroastrians), Buddhists, and Sikhs as high as 20,000 each; and Baha'is at 30,000. The "other" category includes tribes whose members practice traditional indigenous religions, those who normally do not declare themselves to be adherents of a specific religion, and those who do not practice any religion but remain silent about that fact. Social pressure is such that few persons would admit to being unaffiliated with any religion.

Punjab is the largest province in the country; with 82.5 million persons, it contains 55 percent of the country's population. While Sunni Muslims are the vast majority in Punjab, more than 90 percent of the country's Christians also reside there, making them the largest religious minority in the province. Approximately 60 percent of Punjab's Christians live in rural villages. The largest group of Christians belongs to the Church of Pakistan, an umbrella Protestant group that is a member of the Anglican Communion; the second largest group belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. The rest are from different evangelical and church organizations.

Hindus constitute approximately 8 percent of the population of Sindh province. A few tribes in Sindh and Balochistan practice traditional indigenous religions, and there is also a small population of Parsis (approximately 7,000 persons). The Ismailis are concentrated in Karachi (in Sindh Province) and the Northern Areas, locally referred to as Gilgit and Baltistan. According to experts, the Shi'a population is estimated to be 23 percent of the total Karachi population while they are approximately 10 percent of the country's total population. The tiny but influential Parsi community is concentrated in Karachi, although some live in Islamabad and Peshawar (in the NWFP). Christians constitute approximately 2 percent of Karachi's population. 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, Baluchistan. Evangelical Christians have converted a few tribal Hindus of the lower castes from interior Sindh. An estimated 100,000 Hindus live in Karachi. According to local Christian sources, between 70,000 and 100,000 Christians and a few thousand Hindus live in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP).

Ahmadis, who consider themselves Muslims but do not accept that Muhammad was the last prophet, are concentrated in Punjab and Sindh. The spiritual center of the Ahmadi community is in Punjab in the large, predominantly Ahmadi town of Rabwah. In 1998, during Shahbaz Sharif's government, Rabwah was renamed when the Punjab Assembly unanimously adopted the resolution to change the name to Chenab Nagar; this change was against the wishes of the Ahmadi community.

Zikris are a minority group of approximately 200,000 concentrated in the Gwadar District of Balochistan. While Zikris consider themselves Muslims, Sunni religious leaders reject this claim because the Zikris have religious ceremonies that differ significantly from those practiced by other Muslim groups, including a ceremony that is conducted in Turbat, Baluchistan which is similar to the Hajj. While Mullahs have called for Zikris to be declared non-Muslims, no steps have been taken to do so, and Zikris are generally free to practice their religion. Violence against Zikris is reportedly rare; however, societal discrimination and harassment is more common.

No data are available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals. However, because religion is tied closely to a person's ethnic, social, and economic identity, it often plays an important part in daily life. Most Muslims offer prayers at least once a week, especially on Friday since that is Islam's holy day. The vast majority of Muslim men and women pray at home or at the workplace during one or more of the five daily times of prayer. During the month of Ramadan, many otherwise less observant Muslims fast and attend mosque 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, depending upon location and caste. Hindu shrines and temples are scattered throughout the country, although most of them are now used as residences. Approximately 1,500 Hindu temples and shrines exist in Sindh and approximately 500 in Baluchistan. Most of these are tiny, wayside shrines. 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 Sialkot District (where Guru Nanak is buried).

Parsis practice the Zoroastrian religion and have no regularly scheduled congregational services, except during a 10-day religious festival in August called Norooz ("new day") when they celebrate the New Year and pray for the dead. All Parsis are expected to attend these services; most reportedly do. During the rest of the year, individuals offer prayers at Parsi temples. Parsis maintain a conscious creedal and ceremonial separation from other religions by preserving rites and forbidding marriage to members of other religions.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country. The largest Christian mission group operating in Sindh and Baluchistan engages in Bible translation for the Church of Pakistan, a united church of Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans that is affiliated with the Anglican Communion. 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 provides for freedom of religion and 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 Ahmadi. The Constitution provides that there shall be no taxation for propagation of a religion that is not one's own, no obligation to receive instruction in a religion that is not one's own, and no denial of admission to public schools on the basis of religion. However, according to the Constitution, the country is an Islamic republic, and Islam is the state religion. Islam is a core element of the country's national ideology; the country's founders created it to be a homeland for Muslims, although they did not envisage it as a purely Islamic state. Under the Constitution, both the President and the Prime Minister must be Muslims, and all senior officials are required to swear an oath to preserve the country's "Islamic ideology." Freedom of speech is provided for; however, this right is subject to "reasonable restrictions" that can be imposed "in the interest of the glory of Islam." Actions or speech deemed derogatory to Islam or to its prophets are punishable by death.

Under the Second Constitutional Amendment Act of 1974, the Ahmadi community is defined as non-Muslim because Ahmadis do not believe that Mohammed was the last prophet of Islam; however, all Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims.

The Constitution protects religious minorities from being taxed to support the majority religion; no one can be forced to pay taxes for the support of any religion other than his own. For example, Sunni Muslims are subject to the "zakat," an annual religious tax of 2.5 percent of their income; however, Shi'a Muslims and other religious minorities do not pay the "zakat."

Separate categories exist for different religions in the administration of specific religious sites. Because of population shifts that occurred between India and Pakistan after partition, Hindus and Sikhs come under the auspices of the Evacuee Property Board, which is located in Lahore and is empowered to settle disputes regarding Hindu and Sikh property. However, Hindus and Sikhs also may settle such disputes in civil courts. Christian churches are free to take their disputes over religious property and management to the courts. Some minorities have expressed displeasure over government management of religious property.

In Sindh Muslim mosques and shrines come under the purview of the Auqaf Administration Department, a branch of the provincial government devoted to the upkeep of shrines and mosques, facilities for pilgrims, and the resolution of disputes over possession of a religious site. In both Sindh and Baluchistan, the government has provided funds for the upkeep and repair of the Hindu Gurumander temple in Karachi and funded the repair of Hindu temples damaged by Muslim rioters protesting the destruction of the Babri mosque by Hindu mobs in Ayodhya, India, in 1992.

Permission to buy land comes from one municipal bureaucracy, and permission to build a house of worship comes from another. For all religious groups, the process often can be subject to bureaucratic delays and requests for bribes, as it is for other similar nonreligious transactions as well.

The Constitution safeguards "educational institutions with respect to religion." For example, under the Constitution, 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 also is prohibited under the Constitution.

"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 are not provided with parallel studies in their own religions. In some schools, non-Muslim students may study "Akhlaqiyyat," or Ethics, rather than Islamiyyat. In practice teachers compel many non-Muslim students to complete Islamic studies.

From June 3 to 13, the Government imposed a curfew in the northern area of Gilgit after the Shi'a majority protested to demand that the Government provide Shi'a-specific textbooks for classes in Islamic studies. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government believed the controversy had been resolved through negotiated compromises with some Shi'a scholars.

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 Mohammed, a measure designed to single out Ahmadis, who do not adhere to this tenet of Sunni and Shi'a Islam. Non-Muslims must have their religion verified by the head of their local religious community. 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. For example, at the Agricultural University in Faisalabad, students of other religions reportedly refuse to eat with Ahmadis.

In June 2002, the Government announced the Madrassa Registration Ordinance, which went into effect immediately. Under the ordinance, all madrassas (Muslim religious schools) were required to register with the Government and Madrassa boards. The Government formed the Pakistan Madrassa Education Board to combine both registration and education activities. Madrassas failing to do so were to be fined or closed. The ordinance prohibited madrassas from accepting grants or foreign aid from foreign sources, while madrassas offering courses in science, math, Urdu, and English would be eligible for government funding in these subjects. Foreign madrassa students were required to obtain permission to enroll from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Interior in the form of "no objection certificates." The ordinance was designed to regulate the madrassas, where many poor children are educated, and to combat religious extremism. Madrassas were given 6 months to comply with the ordinance.

The National Assembly was recently informed by the Minister of Education, Zobaida Jalal, that 5,782 out of a total of 11,822 madrassas have registered. The total number of madrassas; however, is unknown and may range as high as 80,000. The majority are small and informal. Many madrassas refused to cooperate, and the religious political parties rallied crowds in opposition to the reform. The Government suspended the registration program in 2003, but on May 17, the Minister for Education asked the Government to renew the registration program, but not directly through the Ministry of Education. As of the end of the period covered by this report, no madrassas have been closed or otherwise penalized for failure to comply with the ordinance.

In June 2003, the Provincial Assembly of NWFP, dominated by the MMA, unanimously approved the NWFP Shari'a Act 2003, ruling that all future legislation should be in accordance with Shari'a law, existing legislation should be reviewed in light of Shari'a, and education and financial sectors should be brought in line with Islamic teaching. This was the first time in the country's history that a Shari'a Act had been passed by a provincial legislature; however, the act is almost identical to the 1991 Shari'a Act passed at the federal level, which was already binding on the entire country. During the period covered by this report, no existing legislation was forwarded to the provincial legislature for review based on the Shari'a act.

In May 2003, a directive by the provincial NWFP Government ordered civil servants to pray five times a day; however, the directive has not been enforced, and no action has been taken against civil servants who do not pray. The prayer directive followed curbs on the sale of "vulgar" music and videos, destruction of posters featuring women and advertising Western products, and the imposition of a complete ban on alcohol. There have been sporadic incidents of police detaining shopkeepers for selling music CDs and videos, as part of the NWFP Government's "anti-obscenity" drive; most were released after a night in detention and the payment of fines.

Several Muslim religious holidays are considered national holidays, including Eid ul-Fitr, Eid ul-Azha, Ashura (the 9th and 10th days of the month of Muharram) and the Prophet Mohammed's birthday. Most businesses have limited hours during the month of Ramadan.

In May 2002, under increasing pressure from fundamentalist leaders, the Government reinstated a column on the voter registration form that required Muslims to take an oath accepting the finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed. When joint electorates were restored in January 2002, this oath was removed from voter registration forms, but religious leaders protested because voter lists no longer identified Ahmadis. In June 2002, the Election Commission announced that it would accept challenges from members of the public to the voting status of Ahmadis who registered to vote as Muslims. Voters with objections filed against them are required either to sign an oath swearing to the finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed or be registered as non-Muslims on the voter list. In protest the Ahmadi community notified the President in September 2002, that it would boycott the October 2002 elections. No Ahmadis are known to have voted, but there has been no change in the Government's policy.

The Government designates religion on citizens' passports. To obtain a passport, citizens must declare whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim; Muslims also must affirm that they accept the unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed, declare that Ahmadis are non-Muslims, and specifically denounce the founder of the Ahmadi movement.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government does not ban formally the public practice of the Ahmadi faith, but the practice is restricted severely by law. A 1974 constitutional amendment declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims because they do not accept Mohammed as the last prophet of Islam. However, Ahmadis consider themselves to be Muslims and observe Islamic practices. In 1984 the Government added Section 298(c) into the Penal Code, prohibiting 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. This section of the Penal Code, commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi law," has caused problems for Ahmadis, particularly the provision that forbids them from "directly or indirectly" posing as Muslims. This vague wording has enabled mainstream Muslim religious leaders to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting form and for naming their children Mohammed. The constitutionality of Section 298(c) was upheld in a split-decision Supreme Court case in 1996. The punishment for violation of this section is imprisonment for up to 3 years and a fine. This provision has been used by the government and anti-Ahmadi religious groups to target and harass Ahmadis. Ahmadis also are prohibited from holding any public conferences or gatherings, and since 1983 they have been denied permission to hold their annual Ahmadi conference. Ahmadis are banned from preaching or adopting social practices that make them appear to be Muslims. Their publications also are banned from public sale; however, they 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. Several Ahmadi mosques reportedly have been closed; others reportedly have been desecrated or had their construction stopped. For example, the police stopped construction of an Ahmadi mosque in a village in Sargodha in January. An Ahmadi mosque was seized at Ahmadnagar in October 2003, and a mosque in Sayedwala was attacked and destroyed in 2001 by a large group of persons led by the village mullahs. The Government has not given the Ahmadis permission to rebuild it. Ahmadis also are prohibited from being buried in Muslim cemeteries. According to press reports, the authorities continued to conduct surveillance on the Ahmadis and their institutions.

The Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs issues registration documents to pilgrims for their pilgrimage to Mecca. In July 2003, it added a new section to the documents in which the applicant has to certify on a printed oath that the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani, was a "cunning person and an imposter."

The "blasphemy laws" are contained in Sections 295, 296, 297, and 298 of the Penal Code and address offenses relating to religion. Section 295(a), a colonial-era provision, originally stipulated a maximum 2-year sentence for insulting the religion of any class of citizens. In 1991 this sentence was increased to 10 years. In 1982 Section 295(b) was added, which stipulated a sentence of life imprisonment for "whoever willfully defiles, damages, or desecrates a copy of the holy Koran."

In 1986 another amendment, Section 295(c), established the death penalty or life imprisonment for directly or indirectly defiling "the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed." In 1991 a court ruled invalid the option of life imprisonment for

this offense. Section 296 outlaws voluntary disturbances of religious assemblies, and Section 297 outlaws trespassing on burial grounds. Section 298(a), another colonial-era provision, forbids the use of derogatory remarks about holy personages. Personal rivals and the authorities have used these blasphemy laws, especially Section 295(c), to threaten, punish, or intimidate Ahmadis, Christians, and Muslims. No person has been executed by the Government under any of these provisions; however, some persons have been sentenced to death, or have died while in official custody.

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.

The blasphemy laws also reportedly have been used to "settle scores" unrelated to religious activity, such as intrafamily or property disputes. Information related to blasphemy cases is difficult to obtain because records often are not maintained properly in prisons and courts; however, according to CLAAS, 14 new blasphemy cases were registered during the period covered by this report; 12 of the accused are Muslims, and 2 are Christians. According to CLAAS, there are almost 100 cases pending against Muslims and 11 against Christians. The National Commission on Justice and Peace (NCJP) reports there were 16 new cases during the period covered by this report, and the total number of ongoing cases was not less than 46. The discrepancy in statistics provided by CLAAS and NCJP is due to the difficulty in monitoring new cases.

On August 7, 2003, the Lahore High Court upheld the life sentences of two Christian men who allegedly set fire to the Koran while being detained in 1999 for suspicion of drug use. The case was pending before the Supreme Court at the end of the period covered by this report.

President Musharraf attempted to modify the blasphemy laws in April 2000. In an attempt to reduce the number of persons who are accused wrongly under the laws, the reform would have required complainants to register new blasphemy cases with the local deputy commissioners instead of with police officials. However, religious and sectarian groups mounted protests against the proposed change, and some religious leaders stated that if the laws were changed, even procedurally, persons would be justified in killing blasphemers. In May 2000, in response to increasing pressure and threats, Musharraf abandoned the proposed reforms to the blasphemy laws.

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.

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; however, the Government restricts the right to freedom of speech with regard to religion. Speaking in opposition to Islam and publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets are prohibited. The penal code mandates the death sentence for anyone defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed, life imprisonment for desecrating the Koran, and up to 10 years' imprisonment for insulting another's religious beliefs with intent to outrage religious feelings. Ahmadis frequently are prosecuted under this law, but Muslims rarely are prosecuted for this offense. For example, Ameer Hamza, a leader of the banned terrorist group Lashkar-e-Tayyibba, wrote a highly derogatory book about Hinduism in 1999 called "Hindu Ki Haqeeqat" ("Reality of (a) Hindu"); he was not prosecuted.

In January 2001, Government authorities closed a leading provincial newspaper, "The Frontier Post," and arrested five of its employees following the publication of a letter to the editor that contained comments that were critical of the Prophet of Islam. Law enforcement officials failed to prevent a mob from setting fire to the newspaper's printing presses in January 2001, which stopped publication for 3 months. The arrested employees were later released, with the exception of Munawar Mohsin, the copy editor who had accepted the letter for publication and was responsible for putting it into the newspaper's "letters" section. Mohsin was convicted of blasphemy on July 8, 2003, and sentenced to life imprisonment and a fine of approximately $880 (51,246.48 Pakistani rupees). At the end of the period covered by

this report, Mohsin was still detained as his appeal was pending with the Peshawar High Court.

Ahmadis charge that they suffer from restrictions on their press. On July 19, 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.

Foreign books and magazines, except for publications from India and Israel, may be imported freely, but they are subject to censorship for objectionable religious content. Christian scriptures and books are readily available, but Christians have reported concerns about pressure leading to self-censorship. The Government restricts the distribution and display of certain religious images, such as the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ. Recently, however, some newspapers started placing small advertisements inviting individuals to learn about the Bible and the Torah.

In January 2002, the Government eliminated the country's system of separate religious-based electorates, which had been a longstanding point of contention between religious minorities and human rights groups on one side and the Government on the other. With the elimination of the separate electorate system, political representation is to be based on geographic constituencies that represent all residents, regardless of religious affiliation. Minority group leaders believe this change may help to make public officials take notice of the concerns and rights of minority groups. Because of their often geographically concentrated populations, religious minorities could have significant influence as swing voting blocks in some constituencies. Few non-Muslims are active in the country's mainstream political parties due to limitations on their ability to run for elected office under the previous separate electorate system. There are over 100 district nazims (mayors) and approximately 350 tehsil nazims in the country; all are Muslims.

While most minority leaders welcomed the return of joint electorates, some complained that the elimination of reserved seats made the election of any minority members unlikely. In response to this complaint, the Government announced in August 2002 that reserved parliamentary seats for religious minorities would be restored. Non-Muslims are now able to vote both for a local candidate in their geographic constituencies and for a representative of their religious group.

In May 2002, under increasing pressure from fundamentalist leaders, the Government reinstated a column on the voter registration form that required Muslims to take an oath accepting the finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed. After joint electorates were restored in January 2002, this oath initially was removed from voter registration forms, but religious leaders protested because voter lists no longer identified Ahmadis. In June 2002, the Election Commission also announced that it would accept objections from members of the public to Ahmadis who registered to vote as Muslims. Voters with objections filed against them are required either to sign an oath swearing to the finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed or to be registered as non-Muslims on the voter list. In protest the Ahmadi community notified the President in September 2002 that it would boycott the October 2002 elections. No Ahmadis are known to have voted, but the Government's policy has not changed.

Links with coreligionists in other countries are maintained relatively easily. The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan report no difficulties. Ismailis communicate regularly with their headquarters; their officials, including Prince Karim Aga Khan, visit the country regularly. Under reciprocal visa arrangements, Indian Hindu and Sikh leaders and groups travel regularly to the country. However, the Government prohibits Ahmadis from participating in the Hajj (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia), and Baha'is are prohibited effectively from traveling to their spiritual center in Israel because the country does not recognize Israel.

The Government designates religion on citizens' passports. To obtain a passport, citizens must declare whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim; Muslims also must affirm that they accept the unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed, declare that Ahmadis are non-Muslims, and specifically denounce the founder of the Ahmadi movement as a false prophet.

Missionaries are allowed to operate in the country, and proselytizing is permitted (except by Ahmadis) 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 missionary visas, which have a validity of 2 to 5 years and allow only one entry into the country per year. Only "replacement" visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries are available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems are frequent.

The authorities sometimes prevent leaders of politico-religious parties from traveling to certain areas if they believe that the presence of such leaders would increase sectarian tensions or cause public violence. On June 26, Maulana Fazlur

Rahman, and Qazi Hussain Ahmed, two prominent leaders of the MMA, were sent back after trying to travel to Karachi for a "peace march."

Civil marriages do not exist; marriages are performed and registered according to one's religion. Upon conversion to Islam, the marriages of Hindu or Christian men remain legal; however, upon conversion to Islam, the marriages of Hindu or Christian women, or of other non-Muslims that were performed under the rites of the previous religion, are considered dissolved. 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.

While there is no law instituting the death penalty for apostates (those who convert from Islam), social pressure against conversion is so powerful that most conversions reportedly take place in secret.

Members of minority religions volunteer for military service in small numbers, and there are no official obstacles to their advancement. However, in practice non-Muslims rarely, if ever, rise above the rank of colonel and are not assigned to politically sensitive positions. Ahmadis report severe discrimination in the civil service. They 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.

The Government nationalized all church schools and colleges in Punjab and Sindh in 1972. The Government of Sindh gradually denationalized church schools (without providing compensation) from 1985 to 1995. The Government of Punjab devised a plan to denationalize schools and return them to their original owners in 1996. In Punjab several schools belonging to the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (PCUSA) and other denominations were denationalized and returned to the former owners starting in 1998. In November 2001, the Government of Punjab notified PCUSA of the denationalization of six schools. The Church gained possession of three of these schools, but a group of teachers filed a case in civil court challenging the denationalization and obtaining stay orders against the PCUSA. The Government has retained possession of the other three schools while the case is pending. In March 2003, the Punjab Government returned Forman Christian College, arguably the most prominent Christian-founded educational institution in the country, to PCUSA; however, its case resumed in court in July 2003 and the stay order was extended in August 2003. The fate of two other major nationalized institutions, Gordon College in Rawalpindi (PCUSA) and Muree College in Muree (Church of Pakistan), remained undecided as of the end of the period covered by this report.

On some university campuses, groups of students, primarily from radical religious organizations, clashed with and intimidated other students, instructors, and administrators over issues such as language, syllabus content, examination policies, grades, doctrine, and dress. Some faculty members at Punjab University in Lahore attempted to remove from the English curriculum words and ideas deemed inappropriate for Islamic society, but they were not successful. The attempts to make changes in the English literature syllabus taught at the Punjab University began in May 2003 when it was decided that the syllabi of 53 disciplines, including the sciences, would be updated. By August a review of books studied in English courses at the University in Lahore singled out several texts, including Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock," Ernest Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises," and Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" for containing offensive sexual connotations which were deemed vulgar.

In November 2003, a group of students, arguing that the display of what they regarded as obscene material and listening to music were against the teachings of Islam, extensively damaged the Department of Visual Studies of the University of Karachi and destroyed musical instruments, sculptures, and paintings.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, which is mandated to safeguard religious freedom, has on its masthead a Koranic 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. The Bishops' Conference of the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), using official budget figures for expenditures in 1998, calculated that the Government actually spent $17 (850 Pakistani Rupees) on each Muslim but only $3.20 (160 Pakistani Rupees) on each religious minority citizen per month.

Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority faiths. For example, all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, are subject to certain provisions of Shari'a. 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. In the Malakand division and the Kohistan district of the NWFP, ordinances require that "all cases, suits, inquiries, matters, and proceedings in the courts shall be decided in accordance with Shari'a." These ordinances define Shari'a as the injunctions found in both the Koran and the Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet Mohammed. Islamic law judges, with the assistance of the Ulema (Islamic scholars), under the general supervision of the Peshawar High Court, try all court cases in the Malakand Division and the Kohistan District. Elsewhere in the country, partial provisions of Shari'a apply.

The Penal Code incorporates the doctrines of Qisas ("a life for a life") and Diyat ("money paid as compensation for murder"). Qisas was invoked in tribal areas. For example, victims' families reportedly have been allowed to kill murderers after conviction by a "jirga" (council of tribal elders). Diyat occasionally was applied as well, particularly in the NWFP, in place of judicial punishment. According to this principle, only the family of the victim, not the Government, may pardon a defendant. Christian activists alleged that when a Muslim kills a non-Muslim, the killer can redress the crime by paying Diyat to the victim's family; however, a non-Muslim who kills a Muslim does not have that option and must serve a jail sentence or face the death penalty. The compensation paid to the family of a non-Muslim or a woman is also less than that offered to a man.

The Hudood Ordinances criminalize nonmarital rape, extramarital sex, and various gambling, alcohol, and property offenses. The Hudood Ordinances, which aim to make the Penal Code more Islamic, provide harsh punishments for violations of Shari'a, including death by stoning for unlawful sexual relations and amputation for other crimes. The ordinances are applied to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Some Hudood Ordinance cases are subject to Hadd, or extreme punishment; others are subject to Tazir, or lesser, punishment. Although both types of cases are tried in ordinary criminal courts, special rules of evidence, which discriminate against non-Muslims and women, apply in Hadd cases. For example, a non-Muslim may testify only if the victim also is non-Muslim. Likewise, the testimony of women, Muslim or non-Muslim, is not admissible in cases involving Hadd punishments. Therefore, if a Muslim man rapes a Muslim woman in the presence of women or non-Muslim men, he cannot be convicted under the Hudood Ordinances for Hadd offenses, but could be given lesser punishments (Tazir) at the discretion of the judge. The Hadd punishments require a high standard of evidence. In the 25 years since the Hudood Ordinances were adopted, not a single Hadd punishment has been carried out. However, on the basis of lesser evidence, ordinary punishments, such as jail terms, whipping, and fines were imposed.

For both Muslims and non-Muslims, all consensual extramarital sexual relations are considered a violation of the Hudood Ordinance. If a woman cannot prove the absence of consent in a rape case, there is a risk that she may be charged with a violation of the Hudood Ordinance for fornication or adultery. The maximum punishment for this offense is public flogging or stoning; however, there are no recorded instances of either type of punishment since the 1980s. According to a police official, in a majority of rape cases, the victims are pressured to drop rape charges because of the threat of Hudood charges being brought against them.

On January 22, the National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW) criticized the Hudood Ordinances and recommended their repeal in a formal report. The commission also stated that the laws on adultery and rape have been subject to widespread misuse, and that 95 percent of the women accused of adultery are found innocent in either the court of first instance or on appeal. However, the commission pointed out that, by that time, the woman may have spent months in jail, suffered sexual abuse at the hands of the police, and seen her reputation destroyed. The commission found that the main victims of the Hudood Ordinances were poor women who were unable to defend themselves against slanderous charges. According to the commission, husbands and other male family members sometimes used the laws to punish their wives and female family members for reasons that have nothing to do with perceived sexual impropriety. Some human rights groups also add that members of less influential classes, including men, are disadvantaged by this law. At least one-third of the women in the jails in Lahore, Peshawar, and

Mardan in 1998 were awaiting trial for adultery under the Hudood Ordinances. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) stated that this ratio remained unchanged during 2001; no new estimates were available for the period covered by this report. HRCP's review of human rights for 2003 reported that according to the final report of the special committee on the Hudood Ordinance constituted by the NCSW, 88 percent of women prisoners in the country were in jail as a result of ambiguities in the Hudood Ordinance.

Human rights monitors and women's groups believe that a narrow interpretation of Shari'a has had a harmful effect on the rights of women and minorities, as it reinforces popular attitudes and perceptions and contributes to an atmosphere in which discriminatory treatment of women and non-Muslims is accepted more readily. Some Islamic scholars also stated privately that the Hudood Ordinances are a misapplication of Shari'a.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Police torture and other forms of mistreatment of persons in custody are common. In August 2003, Samuel Masih, a 27-year-old Christian, was charged under the blasphemy laws for allegedly throwing trash on the outer wall of a mosque in Lahore. After a severe bout of tuberculosis in jail, he was moved to a hospital on May 21 under police custody. The next day, a constable assigned to guard him hit him on the head with a brick cutter, telling authorities later that he hoped "to earn a place in heaven" by killing a blasphemer. Masih died of his wounds on May 28; the constable has been charged with murder.

Rehmat Masih died at Lahore Services Hospital in April 2003, after reportedly being tortured by police. Rehmat Masih and a fellow Christian, Iqbal Masih, both sanitary workers at the civil secretariat, were taken into custody by the Sanda police on March 2, 2003. They were charged with stealing law books, while more than 10 Muslim clerks, secretaries, and other office staff, who had direct access to the books, were not accused. Rehmat did not accept the theft charges. A senior official, who reportedly wanted to protect the real culprit, pressured police to torture Rehmat Masih. The two suspects were held illegally for police interrogation for 20 days, after which Rehmat Masih was sent to the Lahore District Jail. Reportedly, police again tortured him. When his condition deteriorated, he was admitted to the hospital, where he died. After his death, protesters demanded that the Government issue murder charges against the police. One protester, Rehmat Masih's nephew, was struck on the head by a police baton and subsequently died. In April 2003, the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance registered a complaint against the police and the senior official. As of the end of the period covered by this report, no action had been taken, but according to CLASS, Rehmat Masih's wife was given 100,000 rupees (approximately $2,000) as compensation. In 2002 reportedly five persons were killed after being charged with blasphemy; however, these individuals never came to trial. Reportedly, they were Zahid Shah (from Chak Jhumbra), Zhim Hameed Khan (Bawalpur), Yousaf Ali (Lahore), Asghar Ali (Nosherah Wirkan), and Saeed Bhatti (Lahore).

There have been instances in which police have used excessive force against individuals because of their religious beliefs and practices; however, sometimes it was difficult to determine whether religious affiliation was a factor in police brutality. The police also have failed to act against persons who use force against others because of their religious beliefs. The Government admits that police brutality against all citizens is a problem. However, both the Christian and Ahmadi communities have documented instances of the use of excessive force by the police and police inaction to prevent violent and often lethal attacks on members of their communities.

Prison conditions, except for the "class A" facilities provided to wealthy and politically high profile prisoners, are extremely poor and constitute a threat to the life and health of prisoners. According to the NCJP and CLAAS, non-Muslim prisoners generally are accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates.

There are reports that more than 100 persons were being held on blasphemy charges. The Ahmadi leadership claims 14 Ahmadis are currently detained under blasphemy and/or anti-Ahmadi laws.

According to the NCJP, religious minorities constitute a proportionally greater percentage of the prison population. Government officials state that although religious minorities account for approximately 5 percent of the country's population, 25 percent of the cases filed under the blasphemy laws are aimed at religious minorities. According to the NCJP, from 1987 to 2004, there were 580 persons accused of blasphemy: 290 Muslims; 203 Ahmadis; 79 Christians; and 8 Hindus. During the period covered by this report, 43 persons had blasphemy cases filed against them with the police; 14 of these cases have resulted in formal charges: 10 cases against Muslims; 2 against Christians; and 2 against Ahmadis. At the end of the period cov-

ered by this report, approximately 100 court cases were pending against Muslims and 11 against Christians. According to CLAAS, from 2000 until the end of the period covered by this report, 45 cases were registered against Christians and 147 against Muslims.

The blasphemy laws were intended to protect both majority and minority faiths from discrimination and abuse; however, in practice rivals and the authorities frequently use these laws to threaten, punish, or intimidate religious minorities. Credible sources estimate that several hundred persons have been arrested since the laws were implemented; however, significantly fewer persons have been tried. Most of the several hundred persons arrested in recent years have been released due to a lack of sufficient evidence. However, many judges reportedly have issued guilty verdicts to protect themselves and their families from retaliation by religious extremists. When blasphemy and other religious cases are brought to court, extremists often pack the courtroom and make public threats about the consequences of an acquittal. Lower level magistrates generally are more susceptible to pressure by religious extremists than the higher-level judiciary. The government provided protection to human rights lawyers defending accused blasphemers following threats and attacks on lawyers by religious extremists. Many of those accused of blasphemy face harassment and even death before reaching trial, during incarceration, or even after acquittal on clear-cut proof that the charges were false. Islamic extremists have vowed categorically to kill all accused blasphemers, regardless of judicial acquittals. As a result, the accused often are denied requests for bail on the grounds that their lives would be at risk from vigilantes if released. When released, many of the acquitted go into hiding until they can secure asylum outside the country.

Anwar Masih, a Christian, was arrested in November 2003 under section 295(a) of the blasphemy laws, which makes it illegal to insult the religion of another citizen. A Christian convert to Islam, Mohammed Naseer Ahmad, accused Masih of defiling the name of the Prophet Muhammad and using derogatory language about Islam. Ahmad reportedly was angered when Masih refused to convert to Islam at Ahmad's request. Masih was released on bail on June 4 and is in sanctuary within the country.

Yusuf Ali, a Sufi Muslim who had been convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death in 2000, was shot and killed in the Lahore Central Jail by another inmate in 2002. The prisoner who killed Ali, Tariq Butt, was a member of the banned Muslim extremist group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan. At the end of the period covered by this report, Butt was confined in Lahore's Central Jail, and the case against him still was pending. Some prison officials were arrested in connection with the incident, including an Assistant Superintendent, who reportedly accepted responsibility for the incident and resigned. Punitive actions were taken against three prison officials after a departmental inquiry in 2002: the Superintendent's salary for a year was forfeited; the Deputy Superintendent's rank was lowered by one level; and the Assistant Superintendent was suspended indefinitely.

Blasphemy laws and the anti-Ahmadi law (Sections 298(b) and 298 (c) of Ordinance XX of 1984) often target members of the Ahmadi community. According to Ahmadi sources, 89 Ahmadis were charged formally in criminal cases on a "religious basis" (including blasphemy) in 2002, compared with 70 cases in 2001 and 166 cases in 2000. In 2003 approximately 80 Ahmadis were arrested, and according to Ahmadi sources, 6 Ahmadis similarly were charged since January.

In July 2003, Nasreen Tah and her brother Ehsanullah were charged with blasphemy for allegedly burning some pages of the Koran; Nasreen was released on bail, but her brother was not. A blasphemy case was registered against Ghulam Hussain of Rajanput in June 2003 for defiling the honor of the Koran and speaking out against the Prophet Muhammad; the Ahmadi community claims the case is fabricated and personally motivated. In March 2002, a foreign Ahmadi of Pakistani origin was arrested, tried, and acquitted of publishing blasphemous pamphlets. In April 2001, four Ahmadis, including Abdul Majeed, president of the local Ahmadi community, were charged with blasphemy for constructing minarets and the Mihrab (prayer niche inside the mosque in the wall facing Mecca) of an Ahmadi mosque. The defendants in all four cases were acquitted by the court in January 2003.

In 2003 Mohammad Nawaz, an Ahmadi leader in Okara District, Punjab, was sentenced to 25 years in jail on charges stemming from a 1999 blasphemy case. The case was appealed to the Lahore High Court; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, Nawaz was detained in the Multan City jail while his appeal was pending.

The blasphemy laws also have been used to harass Christians and other religious minorities, often resulting in cases that persist for years. Religious extremists, who are often part of an organized group, also have killed persons accused under the provisions but acquitted. In April 2003, the District and Sessions Court in

Faisalabad sentenced Ranjha Masih to life in prison, allegedly for damaging a Muslim signboard during a bishop's funeral in 1998. Masih has been detained without bail since his arrest in 1998. The judge postponed the verdict several times. As of the end of the period covered by this report, Masih's appeal still was pending in the Lahore High Court.

In April 2001 police registered a blasphemy case against Pervez Masih, a Christian who ran a private school in Sialkot district, Punjab. According to press reports, Masih was charged because he had answered a student's questions about the Prophet Muhammad's life. However, according to CLAAS, the Sunni Muslim owner of another private school charged Masih with blasphemy because he was jealous of Masih's success in attracting both Muslim and non-Muslim students. Masih remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report, and the case against him still was pending at the District and Sessions Court in Daska, Sialkot district.

Police also arrested Muslims under the blasphemy laws; government officials maintain that approximately three-quarters of the total number of blasphemy cases actually brought to trial involved Muslims. Often the cases are protracted, with a very lengthy appeal process. In 2002, a lower court sentenced Wajihul Hassan to death for allegedly having made derogatory remarks about the Prophet Mohammed during phone calls to a lawyer. His case still was being appealed at the end of the period covered by this report, and he remained in detention. In 1998, a Shi'a Muslim, Ghulam Akbar, was convicted of blasphemy in Rahimyar Khan, Punjab, for allegedly making derogatory remarks about the Prophet Mohammed in 1995, and he was sentenced to death. Akbar's death sentence was the first such sentence for a Muslim for a violation of the blasphemy law. Akbar is presently in Multan District Jail, and his appeal of the death sentence still was pending before the Bahawalpur Bench of the Lahore High Court. In 2001, a Sunni Muslim, Younis Sheikh, was sentenced to death for blasphemy in Rawalpindi, Punjab, reportedly for stating in front of his students at Capital Homeopathic College that the Prophet Mohammed's first marriage was not conducted according to Islamic law and custom, and Mohammed could not have been a Muslim before he had received his revelation from God because the Muslim religion logically had not existed until then. Sheikh was acquitted and released in November 2003. As a result of death threats from religious extremists, he sought and received asylum in a European country. In April 2003, Irshad Bibi, a Muslim woman who tried to mediate an argument between a tonga (horse-drawn passenger wagon) driver and a shopkeeper in the town of Pasrur in Sialkot District, had her clothing torn by the shopkeeper. When she went to a police station to file a report against the shopkeeper, he and two accompanying maulvis (religious leaders) provoked her into an argument by insulting her. One of the maulvis then registered a police case against her for insulting his beard, which he considered to be an insult to the Prophet Mohammed. Bibi was arrested in April 2003, but she was acquitted of blasphemy charges on July 12, 2003.

There were also many charges against Ahmadis under section 298C. For example, in September 2003, Muhammad Arif was accused of preaching the Ahmadi religion to a local mullah. However, according to the Ahmadi community, Arif and the mullah had been disputing the mullah's failure to pay a bill. In November 2003, Daud Ahmad Muzaffar was charged under section 298C after he stopped at a madrassa to use the restroom. In December 2003, the president of the local Ahmadi community in Khanpur, Ismail, and his son, Tayyab, were arrested under section 298C after Ismail questioned the basis of the mullah's anti-Ahmadi sermons.

There were several incidents of sectarian violence during the period covered by this report. In July 2003, three men armed with rifles and grenades attacked a Shi'a congregation of some 2,000 worshippers in Quetta killing 53 persons and injuring 65. The attackers were later linked with Sunni extremist Lashkar-e-Jhangvi group. On February 28, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a Shia mosque in Rawalpindi, injuring three worshipers. According to the police, the suicide bomber belonged to a radical Sunni group. On March 3, more than 50 persons were killed after gunmen fired on and hurled grenades at a Shia religious procession in Quetta. The procession returned fire, reportedly killing the three assailants. On May 7, 28 persons were killed and almost 100 injured by a suicide bomber at a Shia mosque in Karachi. On June 14, police arrested Gul Hasan for a separate incident. Hasan reportedly confessed to police his complicity in the Karachi mosque bombing. Hasan remains in detention while charges are pending. Human rights organizations claimed seven relatives of the suicide bomber Akbar Niazi Pathan were also arrested in the case. No further information was available on their status at the end of the period covered by this report.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were reports of forced religious conversions during the reporting period. Religious minorities state that members of their communities, especially minors, sometimes are pressured by private groups and individuals to convert to Islam.

During the period covered by this report, there were no specific reports 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.

Human rights groups report that there have been incidents in which persons from minority groups, especially Hindus and Christians, have been abducted and forcibly converted. The Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) and the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA) reported the attempted forced conversion of two Christians during the period covered by this report.

On April 17, Javed Anjum stopped at a madrassa for some water. According to CLAAS, when the staff discovered he was Christian, they ordered him to embrace Islam. When he refused, they detained him at the madrassa for 5 days and beat him. On May 2, he died as a result of the beatings; an investigation is on-going (see Section III). Another incident reportedly occurred in November 2003, when Zeeshan Gill was abducted and taken to a madrassa. At the madrassa, he was converted forcibly to Islam. During the investigation, in front of the police and judges, Zeeshan stated that he had willingly converted; however, according to CLAAS, Zeeshan subsequently told his mother that he was forced to convert. During the period covered by this report, Zeeshan was in hiding and supported by an NGO that works on religious freedom issues.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reported that in January 2003 a 6-year-old Sikh girl was kidnapped by members of the Afridi tribe, in a remote tribal area of the Northwest Frontier Province. The alleged kidnapper claimed that the girl was actually 12-years-old, that she had converted to Islam, and, therefore, could not be returned to live with her non-Muslim family. There had been no judicial action during the period covered by this report.

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. Many extremists, including Hafiz Sayeed, leader of the banned group, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, have been quoted extensively as calling for Hindus to be killed and for jihad against Westerners. On January 17, police arrested Shamin Ahmed, a member of the foreign terrorist organization Lashkar i Jhangvi. Ahmed is accused of participating in the January 15 grenade attack on the Bible Society office in the Holy Trinity Church in Karachi. The attack was designed to bring the police and other officials to the site, and 15 minutes after the initial attack another bomb in a nearby car exploded and injured 16 persons. Police investigations of the attack were continuing at the end of the period covered by this report. Members of Lashkar i Jhangvi also were implicated in the July 2003 suicide attack on Shi'a worshippers in Quetta in which 53 persons died and 65 were injured. Reportedly, three of the attackers died at the scene, and one was arrested but died shortly thereafter; however, information is inconsistent.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took some steps to improve the situation of religious minorities during the period covered by this report. In November 2003, the Government banned, under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997, three extremist groups that were reconstituted versions of organizations previously banned in 2002. Each of the newly banned groups promoted sectarian violence and intolerance. The groups banned were Millat-e-Islami (the former Sipah Sahaba), a Sunni extremist group whose leader had been ambushed and killed in Islamabad in October 2003; Islami Tehreek Pakistan (the former Tehreek-e-Jafariya), a Shi'a extremist group whose leader was arrested for involvement in the killing of the leader of Millat-e-Islami; and Khuddamul Islam (the former Jaish-e-Muhammad), a Sunni extremist group that also promoted jihad in Kashmir and Afghanistan. The bans on these groups were accompanied by the detention of their top leaders, the closing of their offices across the country, and the freezing of their assets held in all Pakistani banks, both domestic and foreign based. Nearly all of those detained following the initial bans were later released. However, members of the groups were placed on "Schedule Four" of the Anti-Terrorism Act, which, among other limitations, allows the government to restrict their movements in the country and to monitor their activities.

A 3-year Human Rights Mass Awareness and Education Project, begun by the Government in 2001 with funding from the Asian Development Bank, was ongoing

during the period covered by this report. Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were engaged actively in the process. The Government also continued to promote human rights awareness in its training of police officers.

In August 2003, President Pervez Musharraf announced a reform package designed to improve educational quality at the country's thousands of madrassas. In August the Finance Minister announced $100 million (approximately 5.8 billion rupees) in funding for the plan. The 3-year reform plan is meant to expand job possibilities for madrassa graduates, many of whom are currently prepared for employment only with religious institutions. The reform plan will provide funding to encourage the teaching of English, mathematics, economics, and computer technology. Many unregistered madrassas currently provide education only in the Koran, Arabic, and Urdu.

On March 22, legislation to repeal the Hudood Ordinances was introduced in the National Assembly by an opposition politician. On May 15, President Musharraf called for a review of the Hudood Ordinances and the blasphemy laws and announced the creation of a National Commission for Human Rights that would review and report on all forms of human rights abuses, including the rights of religious minorities. However, no action had been taken at the end of the period covered by this report.

In November 2003, the Government removed Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian minority rights activist, from its Exit Control List. Bhatti had been placed on the list, which restricted his right to travel abroad, earlier in the year. In a high profile case, Younis Sheikh was acquitted of blasphemy on November 21, 2003.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Many religious and community leaders, both Muslim and non-Muslim, reported that a small minority of extremists account for the vast majority of violent acts against religious minorities. However, discriminatory religious legislation has encouraged an atmosphere of religious intolerance, which has led to acts of violence directed against Ahmadis, Shi'as, Christians, Hindus, and Zikris. Members of religious minorities are subject to violence and harassment, and police at times refuse to prevent such abuses or refuse to charge persons who commit them (see Section II). Wealthy religious minorities and those who belong to religious groups that do not seek converts report fewer instances of discrimination.

According to human rights groups, while rape is often used against women in general to humiliate and "dishonor" them, minority women such as Hindus and Christians are especially vulnerable. On May 29, a 7-year old Christian girl was raped in Lahore. On April 6, the 2-year old daughter of a Christian laborer at a dairy farm was raped. Another case occurred in December 2003, when 14-year-old Shamim Kausor reportedly was raped by a rickshaw driver and his two friends, who allegedly stated that by raping a Christian girl, they would inherit paradise. In August 2003, a Hindu girl allegedly was raped by a local landlord of the area near Khapro. When the father of the accused swore on the Koran that his son was not present on the date of the incident, the accused was acquitted, and the local police refused to register the case.

Incidents of sectarian violence occurred with considerable frequency. On May 31, there was a bomb blast at the Ali Raza Imambargah which killed at least 22 and wounded 38. Earlier, on May 7, 28 persons were killed and approximately 200 injured by a suicide bomber at the Hyderi Imambargah in Karachi. Gul Hasan, a member of Lashkar-I-Jhangvi, had worked with Mohammad Akhtar Niazi (the suicide bomber) and is under arrest. On March 3, more than 50 persons were killed after gunmen opened fire on and threw grenades at a Shi'a religious procession in Quetta. Armed guards reportedly killed the three assailants. On the same day, 2 persons were killed and 40 injured in a clash between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in Phalia during the same procession. Maulana Syed Aijaz Naqvi, the Senior Vice President of the Punjab Tehrik-e-Jafaria, reportedly had been under house arrest since 3 days earlier in order to prevent him from joining the Shi'a processions. Reportedly, a mob of approximately 1,000 people attacked the Maulana's home and set fire to it. While the Maulana was trying to escape, he reportedly was shot by members of Sipah-e-Sahaba who then dragged his body through the town with a motorcycle for 5 hours. Four security guards of Allama Naqvi and several other persons were injured in the stampede that followed. On February 28, a suicide bomber attacked a Shi'a mosque in Rawalpindi, killing himself and injuring three worshipers. According to police, the suicide bomber belonged to a radical Sunni group.

In November 2003, two men opened fire on a bus carrying Shiite employees of Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission to a Shia mosque for Friday prayers. Five persons were killed and seven were injured.

In July 2003, three men armed with rifles and grenades attacked the Friday Shi'a congregation some 2,000 worshippers at a Shi'a house of worship in Quetta killing 53 persons and injuring 65. Police later claimed that the attackers were associated with the Sunni extremist Lashkar-e-Jhangvi group. Investigations into these incidents were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. This same group claimed responsibility for the killing of 12 Shi'a police cadets in June 2003. Reportedly, the attackers drove past the men, who were sitting in the back of a police truck, and shot them.

In June 2003, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi men Ataullah and Mohammed Azam were prosecuted for killing Raza Peerani in Soldier Bazaar. Two motorcyclists opened fire on the doctor as he got into his car after leaving his clinic. Over the last several years, there have been many cases where Shi'a professionals, including doctors, lawyers, and policemen, have been attacked. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan issued a report on "Sectarian Violence in Karachi from 1994–2002" in which it documented the killing of 37 doctors (9 Sunnis and 28 Shi's) in Karachi between 1994 and 2002. During this period, they documented a total of 293 sectarian killings (91 Sunni and 202 Shi'a).

In 2001, Syed Athar Hussain Rizvi, the Pesh Imam (prayer leader) of Asgharia Imambargah in Bhitai Colony, was killed within the limits of the Korangi Industrial Area. In 2001, Syed Hasan Abidi, a factory owner, also was killed within the Korangi Industrial Area. The Lashkar-e-Jhangvi men, Ataullah and Mohammed Azam, were charged with both of these killings. The victims in both cases were Shia, while the attackers were Sunni. Their trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report, but after hearing final arguments, the judge was expected to pronounce a verdict later in the year.

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 they do not intervene to prevent violence. In 2001, a mob destroyed an Ahmadi mosque in Sheikhpura; authorities did not stop the violence, and later they arrested 28 Ahmadis for civil disorder. The Ahmadis were released quickly, but there have been no steps to prosecute the offenders or compensate Ahmadis for the loss of the mosque.

Ahmadis are willing to rebuild the mosque with private funds; however, the Government has not given them permission to do so. There were also reports that when Ahmadis displayed the kalima (the Muslim declaration of faith) in their homes or mosques, they were torn down or defaced. In August 2003, Ahmadis in Karachi were told that they had to mark out the kalima from their mosque. After the Ahmadis refused, the authorities painted over the kalima.

In February 2003, Mian Iqbal Ahmed, a lawyer and District President of the local Ahmadi community, was killed at his home in Rajanpur by unknown gunmen. In 2002, Maqsud Ahmed was killed in Faisalabad. Rashid Ahmed, a medical doctor, was killed at his clinic in Rahim Yar Khan in 2002. Abdul Waheed was killed in 2002, in Faisalabad. Two persons were accused, apprehended, and tried. One was acquitted while the other was found guilty and sentenced to death. His appeal is pending in the High Court. All of these killings appeared to have been motivated by anti-Ahmadi sentiment. At the close of the period covered by this report, there was no further information on these cases.

In August 2003, Munawwar Ahmad, former chief of the district organization of Ahmadi elders, was shot and wounded by attackers when he answered his door. Police opened an investigation; however, there were no developments during the period covered by this report.

Sectarian violence against Christians continued during the period covered by this report. On May 2, Javed Anjum, a 19-year-old Christian, died in a hospital in Faisalabad. Anjum had drunk water from a tap at a local madrassa and was held by the teachers and students for 5 days; during this time, allegedly he was beaten. Subsequently, he was transferred to police and charged with theft. Because of his injuries, police later transferred him to a hospital in Faisalabad where he died. No arrests had been made at the end of the period covered by this report.

On April 2, a pastor of a church in Manawala was shot and killed when two attackers entered his residence as the family was watching a movie entitled "Jesus." On January 15, the Bible Society of Pakistan in Karachi was attacked and between 12 and 40 people were injured. Reportedly, the police received a phone warning prior to the car bomb explosion. On January 5, a pastor of the Church of God in

Khanewal, Pastor Mukhtar Masih, was murdered by unknown assailants near the Khanewal Rail Station. At the end of the period covered by this report, no one had claimed responsibility, and no one had been arrested.

On January 25, unknown gunmen opened fire on a church in Patoki; no arrests have been made. On July 5, 2003, a Roman Catholic priest, Father George Ibrahim, was killed by unknown persons in an attack on a church in Okara District, Punjab. According to various NGOs, Father Ibrahim was killed because of his involvement in the denationalization of the school and its return to parish management. Unconfirmed reporting claims that four Christians were arrested for the killing and tortured while in police custody; however, reportedly they were released on bail when the High Court intervened. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

In December 2002, 3 Christian girls were killed and 16 persons injured when 2 militants attacked a church with grenades in the Chianwali village in Sialkot District, Punjab. Three police officers were suspended for negligence related to the Christmas attack. The suspects were released on bail on October 2, 2003, by order of the Lahore High Court. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the complainants in the case were under pressure by Muslim militants, the police, and frightened relatives to drop their charges. Three quarters of the Christian residents have left the village. Attacks against Western targets also reportedly increased Christians' sense of insecurity. The Government strongly condemned the attacks against Christians.

Ahmadis suffer from societal harassment and discrimination. Even the rumor that someone may be an Ahmadi or have Ahmadi relatives can stifle opportunities for employment or promotion. Most Ahmadis are home-schooled or go to private, Ahmadi-run schools. Ahmadi students in public schools often are subject to abuse by their non-Ahmadi classmates. The quality of teachers assigned to predominately Ahmadi schools by the government reportedly is poor. In 2002, in response to a question from Islamic clerics, President Musharraf (who has been accused of favoring Ahmadis) declared that he believed Ahmadis are "non-Muslims."

While many Christians belong to the poorest socioeconomic groups, this condition may be due more to ethnic and social factors than to religion. These factors also may account for a substantial measure of the discrimination that poor Christians face. Many poor Christians remain 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, does not reflect major progress despite more than 100 years of consistent missionary aid and development. Christian students reportedly are forced to eat at separate tables in public schools that are predominately Muslim.

Ismailis report that they are the objects of resentment of Sunni Muslims due to the comparative economic advances they have made. The Government has not harassed Ismailis nor have extremist groups targeted them; however, they report that they frequently are pressured to adopt certain practices of conservative Muslims or risk being ostracized socially.

There is no Jewish community, but anti-Semitic sentiment appears to be widespread, and anti-Semitic press articles are common, particularly in the Urdu press.

Some Sunni Muslim groups publish literature calling for violence against Ahmadis and Shi'a Muslims. Some newspapers frequently publish articles that contain derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis and Hindus.

Persons who have been accused under the blasphemy laws (see Section II), including those acquitted of the charges against them, often face societal discrimination. In 2002, Zahid Shah, a Muslim who had been accused and acquitted of blasphemy charges, was stoned to death in Punjab by a mob of approximately 300 villagers enforcing the fatwa of a cleric. Within a week, police had arrested 29 persons in connection with the stoning; however, those arrested were later released, and no convictions had been reported in this case as of the end of the period covered by this report. On July 6, 2002, Pervez Masih, a Christian high school principal who was arrested in 2001 based on allegations by Muslim schoolboys he tutored, was attacked by fellow prison inmate, Ashtar Bashir.

Proselytizing generally is considered socially inappropriate among Muslims; missionaries face some difficulties due to this perception. For example, some Sunni Muslim groups oppose missionary activities and have at times issued verbal threats against missionaries to discourage them from working.

While there is no law instituting the death penalty for apostates (those who convert from Islam), social pressure against conversion is so powerful that most conversions reportedly take place in secret. According to missionaries, police and other local officials harass villagers and members of the poorer classes who convert. Reprisals and threats of reprisals against suspected converts are common.

Discrimination in employment based on religion appears to be widespread. In particular Christians have difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists say that the employment situation has improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years. Christians and Hindus also find themselves disproportionately represented in the country's most oppressed social group, bonded laborers; illegal bonded labor is widespread. Agricultural, brick-kiln, and domestic workers often are kept virtually as slaves. According to the NCJP, the majority of bonded labor in those sectors is non-Muslim. All are subject to the same conditions, whether they are Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. Although the Government removed colonial-era entries for sect from government job application forms to prevent discrimination in hiring, the faith of some, particularly of Christians and Hindus, often can be ascertained from their names.

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.

Embassy officers closely monitored the status of religious freedom and acted when appropriate. In addition senior Embassy officials expressed concern about the Shahbaz Bhatti and Younis Sheikh cases with senior government officials. Embassy officials encouraged government officials to pursue aggressive investigations of incidents involving the bombing of churches. The Embassy also assisted local and international human rights organizations to follow up specific cases involving religious minorities.

The Embassy sponsored several academics to travel to the United States with the International Visitors Program and participate in programs that focus on religious freedom and pluralism. The United States also began to implement a $100 million (approximately 5 billion rupees) educational reform program designed to affect both public and private institutions, including madrassas, positively.

SRI LANKA

The Constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," but it is not recognized as the state religion. The Constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to practice their religion freely, and while the Government publicly endorses this right, in practice there were problems in some areas.

The Government's official respect for religious freedom was unchanged; however, due to the actions of extremists, there was an overall deterioration in religious freedom. In late 2003 and in the initial months of this year, there were many serious attacks on Christian churches and also sometimes against pastors and congregants. Over 100 attacks have been reported, and several dozen were confirmed by diplomatic observers. In response prominent political and religious leaders publicly condemned the attacks, and police arrested approximately a dozen people in connection with some of the incidents. Additionally, despite pressure from extremists, the Government did not take action on draft bills that would criminalize religious conversion by "unethical" means. In May an MP of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) party presented a draft anti-conversion bill as a private member's bill and, shortly after the end of the reporting period, presented the bill to Parliament formally. Several groups have submitted Supreme Court petitions challenging the constitutionality of the draft, and it has sparked intense discussion. As a private member's bill it does not require (and has not received) Government support, and it faces a protracted legislative process prior to any parliamentary vote. In June 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 a review that was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. There has been considerable public discussion of the bills, and many government officials expressed their concern about such legislation. The draft bill presented by the Minister of Buddhist Affairs will not be enacted automatically; it also faces protracted legislative review prior to any parliamentary vote.

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. While 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 appealed the ruling to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. At the same time, the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution supports the right of individuals to practice any religion; however, it does not support the right to proselytize. The Supreme Court rulings have not become law; during the period covered by this report, they were not enforced and groups were not prosecuted for proselytizing. The decisions may, however, have increased societal tensions in some localities. The State also limits the number of foreign religious workers granted temporary residence permits.

U.S. Embassy officials expressed official concern regarding the attacks on churches and the anti-conversion issue in meetings with government leaders. Embassy officials also urged the Government to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of the attacks. The U.S. Government continues to discuss general religious freedom issues with the Government as a part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 25,322 square miles and a population of approximately 19.74 million. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity all are practiced in the country. Approximately 70 percent of the population is Buddhist, 15 percent is Hindu, 8 percent is Christian, and 7 percent is Muslim. Christians tend to be concentrated in the West, with much of the North almost exclusively Hindu. The other parts of the country have a mixture of religions, with Buddhism overwhelmingly present in the south.

Most members of the majority Sinhalese community are Theravada Buddhists. Almost all Muslims are Sunnis, with a small minority of Shi'a, including members of the Borah community. Roman Catholics account for almost 90 percent of the Christians, with Anglicans and other Protestant churches such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Assemblies of God also present in the cities. Evangelical Christian groups have increased in membership in recent years, although the overall number of members in these groups remains 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 officially respects this right; however, in practice there was an overall deterioration in religious freedom. There are separate ministries in the Government that address religious affairs. These include: The Ministry of Buddha Sasana; the Ministry of Muslim Religious Affairs; the Ministry of Hindu Affairs; and the Ministry of Christian Affairs. Each of these ministries has been empowered to deal with issues involving the religion in question. The Ministry of Christian Affairs vocally condemned attacks on Christians; however, following the change of Government in April, it was less publicly active. The Minister has indicated that he would carefully review any proposed anti-conversion bill before taking a position.

In January 2003, a bill intended to curb religious conversions was drafted and presented to the Cabinet. The draft bill was under review by the Attorney General's office in February when President Kumaratunga dissolved Parliament and announced parliamentary elections for April. With the dissolution of Parliament, all pending legislation was cancelled, including the draft "anti-conversion" bill. In May an MP of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) party presented a draft anti-conversion bill as a private member's bill, and, shortly after the end of the period covered by this report, presented the bill to Parliament formally. Several Christian groups have expressed concern that the draft law violates their constitutional right to practice their religion freely and have submitted Supreme Court petitions challenging it. While the potential legislation sparked intense discussion, it has yet to be approved by Parliament or endorsed by the Government. In June the Minister of Buddhist Affairs presented a separate draft anti-conversion bill to the Cabinet. It was not formally approved, but it was sent to the Attorney General for review, which was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. The bills are substantially similar. Each is intended to prohibit the conversion of a person from one religion to another. The private member bill limits the prohibition to only "forcible" conversions, while the ministerial bill attempts to make illegal any religious conversions. Both bills carry penalties, including fines or jail sentences, for anyone convicted of conversion or assisting in conversion. The private member bill has heavier penalties for converting women and children; however, the ministerial bill has stronger penalties

only for children. The ministerial bill holds that each member of a group may be guilty of converting and that any foreigner found guilty under this act shall be declared "persona non grata." There has been considerable public discussion of the bills; however, senior government officials have not supported either bill publicly, and the draft bill presented by the Minister of Buddhist Affairs will not be enacted automatically.

Some Christian denominations have resisted greater government involvement in their affairs. Therefore, they are not registered as charitable organizations, but instead individually through acts of Parliament or as corporations under domestic law. Christian denominations must fill out and submit forms in order to be recognized as corporations. This procedure gives them legal standing to be treated as corporate entities in their 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 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 charity organization. On August 1, 2003, the Supreme Court ruled publicly against an incorporation petition by the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Third Order of Saint Francis. The court denied the petition, claiming that the order could not be incorporated if it were involved in proselytization and providing material benefit. Several Christian groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claim that such a ruling would in effect limit their ability to provide services to the citizens of the country. The religious order submitted an appeal to the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights (UNHCHR) in February. In April the UNHCHR asked the Government to provide a response. The Government raised technical objections, and the UNHCHR said that it would review the appeal, based on both the substantive issues and the technical objections; a response was expected in August.

Despite the constitutional preference for Buddhism, a number of major religious festivals of other faiths are celebrated as national holidays. These include, for example, the Hindu Thai Pongal, New Year, and Deepawali festivals; the Muslim Hadji and Ramzan festivals, and the Holy Prophet's Birthday; and Christian Good Friday and Christmas.

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 (see Section III).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Foreign clergy may work in the country, but for more than three decades, the Government has taken steps to limit the number of foreign Christian religious workers given temporary work permits. Theoretically, there is a certain number of work permits issued for each religious denomination; however, in practice this policy has not been followed recently, and foreign religious workers have been granted tourist visas. Permission usually is restricted to denominations that are registered formally with the Government. Most religious workers in the country, including most Christian clergy, are Sri Lankan in origin.

Religion is a mandatory subject in the school curriculum and taught from an academic point of view. Parents and children may choose whether a child studies Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity. 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. Students of minority religions other than Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity must pursue religious instruction outside of the public school system. If the religion is not one of the four identified religions, the student must study a related religion or obtain the consent of the school authority for separate study. However, proof of religious study outside school is not mandatory. There are no separate syllabuses provided for smaller religions.

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 without hinderance from the government. The application of different legal practices based on membership in a religious or ethnic group may result in discrimination against women. There is no civil law addressing these issues; customary law prevails.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, Christians encountered increased harassment and physical attacks by local Buddhists who felt threatened by these groups (see Section III). Some Christian groups complained that the Government

tacitly condoned harassment and violence; however, the Government at all levels publicly condemned these attacks. In some cases, police response was inadequate, and local police officials reportedly were reluctant to take legal action against Buddhist monks involved in the attacks. NGOs have reported that in the majority of cases the police failed to protect churches and citizens from attacks. However, in some instances, police officials have investigated and arrested individuals in connection with attacks on churches.

Since 1983 the Government (controlled by the Sinhalese, and predominantly Buddhist, majority) has fought the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an insurgent 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, the parties agreed to a joint cease-fire accord. The peace process is fragile; in April 2003, the LTTE pulled out of talks with the Government. To resolve domestic political differences, in April President Kumaratunga dissolved Parliament and called for elections, which Kumaratunga won. At the end of the period covered by this report, the new Government, assisted by Norwegian facilitators, was discussing a resumption of peace negotiations with the LTTE.

Religion did not play a significant role in the conflict, which essentially is rooted in linguistic, ethnic, and political differences. Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians have all 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 the 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. During the period covered by this report, some Christians also visited holy sites in LTTE-controlled areas that were not accessible during the period of armed conflict.

The LTTE targeted Buddhist sites, most notably the historic Dalada Maligawa or "Temple of the Tooth," the holiest Buddhist shrine in the country, in the town of Kandy in January 1998. Thirteen worshipers, including several children, were killed by the bombing. The Government still is attempting to locate and arrest the LTTE perpetrators of the attack. As a result, the Government has augmented security at a number of religious sites island-wide, including the Temple of the Tooth. The LTTE did not target Buddhist sites during the period covered by this report and has not attacked such sites since its 1998 attack on Dalada Maligawa; however, it has not indicated that it will abstain from attacking such targets in the future.

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 LTTE has been listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization since 1997. All ethnic and religious groups have been victimized by the LTTE, but 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 that LTTE actions against Muslims are not due to their religious beliefs, but rather that they are a part of an overall strategy to clear the North and East of persons not sympathetic to their cause. 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 IDPs to return home, asserting they will not be harmed. Although some Muslim IDPs have returned home, the vast majority has not and instead is waiting for a guarantee from the Government for their safety in LTTE-controlled areas. Since the peace process began in 2001, the LTTE has also perpetrated a number of attacks in the East in which Muslims have been killed. No one has been arrested for perpetrating these attacks. In August 2003, four Muslims were killed; while the LTTE denied any involvement, this incident fueled tensions be-

tween the Hindu and Muslim communities in the area. The LTTE also commonly extorts money from Muslim families and businesses in the East.

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, government leaders from the President to the then-Minister of Christian Affairs publicly denounced the attacks. President Kumaratunga specifically said that such attacks would not be tolerated and ordered the police to investigate each incident fully. Since the Government increased its efforts in late 2003, police have arrested almost a dozen people connected with the 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 a number of religious "amity committees" around the island in January; however, after initial sessions, there was little interest in continuing the meetings. Leading Catholic and Buddhist clergy met in May to continue the 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. However, there was a significant increase in the harassment of Christians, especially evangelical groups, and attacks on their property and places of worship during the period covered by the report. The attacks were perpetrated by Buddhists, who violently opposed attempts to convert Buddhists to another religion. Government officials, including the President and leaders of the different faiths, publicly condemned these attacks.

The police attempted to investigate complaints of attacks against Christians and their property, but often they were reluctant to pursue suspected perpetrators who were Buddhist monks. Law enforcement officials continue to believe that a majority of the attacks were conducted by a small number of these Buddhists. During the period covered by this report, several alleged attackers were arrested, and the intensity and frequency of the attacks had declined.

The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka reported that over 100 attacks took place during the period covered by this report. Between December 24 and 29, 2003, there were 20 violent attacks. To some extent, the attacks can be attributed to the sudden death on December 12 of a popular Buddhist monk, who was critical of the actions of both Buddhists and Christians. Consequently, the timing of attacks on churches during the Christmas period appears to be associated with the demonstrations surrounding his funeral (December 24) rather than a separate effort to attack churches during the holiday.

A reputable NGO also reported that in the first 6 months of the year, there were 48 documented attacks on churches, pastors, and congregations. While there was a reduction in violence following the April election, attacks have not ended. Diplomatic observers confirmed several of these attacks, including the following representative cases:

On June 19 and 20, 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.

On May 23, 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.

On May 17, a crowd threatened the pastor of the Prayer Tower Church in Mahawewa in reaction to a rumor that he was building a Bible school. To date police officials have made no arrests.

On April 11, the Christian Fellowship Church in Wadduwa was attacked by a mob led by a Buddhist monk. Attackers threw rocks at the church and attempted to beat worshippers with sticks. Police are investigating the incident. Also on April 11, the residence of the pastor of the Assembly of God church in Ampara District was firebombed. No injuries were reported in the attack, and the police were investigating; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, there were no further details.

On February 15, an Apostolic church in the Boraluwewa District was attacked by a large crowd, and the church and workers' quarters were burned. Five men were arrested and charged with attempting to destroy a place of worship, but they are free on bail. A court date was scheduled for July. A different group also attacked the Gethsemane Church, likewise located in Boraluwewa, on the same day; however, that pastor withdrew charges.

On February 7, the Kebithigollwa office of the Christian NGO World Vision was fire bombed and completely burned. The following day, the police arrested several people, including Buddhist monks, in connection with the incident. The three monks and four other persons were charged with arson but freed on bail. The investigation continued, but at the end of the period covered by this report, no court date had been scheduled. Any further court proceeding, including a trial, awaited decision by the Attorney General.

In January there were 20 attacks against Christian leaders and churches belonging to a variety of denominations reported. Specifically, on January 11, approximately 5,000 Buddhist monks and lay persons participated in an anti-Christian rally in the town of Homagama. On January 26, the Our Mother Most Pure Catholic shrine in Mattegoda was damaged in an arson attack. A police investigation is ongoing; however, at the end of the period covered by this report there were no arrests.

On December 9, 2003, three separate, religious-based attacks occurred in Ratnapura. The local office of the Christian NGO World Vision was attacked and a security guard on the premise was injured. The interiors of Saint Sebastian's Catholic Church and the evangelical Calvary Church also were damaged in the second and third attacks. Police do not have any suspects, but both cases remained under investigation at the end of the period covered by this report.

On December 5, 2003, two Korean Protestant ministers were harassed at their residence in Colombo. Several personal items were stolen. Police were investigating the incident; however, there have been no arrests.

On November 13, 2003, Buddhist monks threatened and harassed the staff at the Borella office of World Vision and accused the group of organizing "unethical conversions;" there were no injuries. A Buddhist monk and several others were arrested in connection with the incident, and a police investigation is ongoing. Both parties made complaints of assault, and the police set the matter for arbitration; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, no date had been determined for the action.

On September 25, 2003, there was an attack on the Assembly of God church in Kesbawa. A Buddhist monk named Ven. Katuwella Chandrasiri allegedly led the attack. The church was damaged seriously, but there were no injuries. A police investigation was ongoing; however, there have been no arrests.

On September 17, 2003, four women associated with the Assembly of God church in Kotadeniyawa were assaulted. The church was subsequently burned on September 23. At the end of the period covered by this report, the police continued to investigate the assaults and arson, but there had not been any arrests.

On August 2, 2003, a member of the Assembly of God church in Thanamalwila was attacked and chased by Buddhist monks. A complaint was filed with the police, but the attackers were not identified and no further action has been taken.

On June 3, 2003, a mob of 100 Buddhists surrounded Saint Stephen's Lutheran Church in Gampaha at midnight and destroyed a small church hall under construction. A Christian family living next door was threatened with death if they reported the incident. Local authorities made an arrest after the attack; however, the arrested individual was released and the case was set for arbitration at a still undetermined date. Villagers threatened to bomb the church if the Christians attempted to rebuild it.

On May 17, 2003, a group of laypersons associated with a local Buddhist temple visited Pastor Rozario at his home in the village of Neluwa, in the Galle District, and instructed him not to convert persons of other faiths to Christianity. Following the incident, Rozario made a complaint to police. On June 13, 2003, other persons attacked Pastor Rozario and set fire to items in his home. Three persons were charged with criminal trespass and intimidation on June 13, 2003. They were released on bail, and a court hearing is scheduled for October.

On May 25, 2003, 500 Hindus broke into the Heavenly Harvest Church in Kaluvenkerni; beat church members, including children; and ransacked the building. Kaluvenkerni is in the tense eastern part of the country, an area with extensive LTTE influence. The Hindu mob then set fire to the homes of all 25 Christian families in the village and tried to force 2 Christians to renounce their faith. The police who arrived on the scene were outnumbered, but they managed to convey the pastor to safety. The LTTE have asked Christian villagers to return and promised to look after their safety; however, none of the Christians returned during the period of this

report. As of the end of the period covered by this report, no arrests had been made, and none seemed likely.

In 2002, a group of Christians vandalized a Jehovah's Witness hall in Negombo, breaking windows, destroying electrical systems, and burning equipment. Members of the congregation claimed that the police did not react to the disturbance until after the crowd dispersed. In November 2002, a Christian mob stormed the same meeting hall, assaulted Jehovah's Witnesses, and again vandalized the premises. In December 2002, an appeal was made by Jehovah's Witnesses for police action and cooperation. A police spokesman reportedly visited the site and submitted a report to the Inspector General of Police; however, there is no record of either action. The results of the police investigation reportedly determined that the fire was deliberately set; however, no suspects have been identified or arrested, and no case has been filed.

There are reports that members of various religious groups give employment preference in the private sector to members of their own group or denomination. This practice does not appear to be based principally on religion. 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. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the Embassy regularly met with representatives of all of 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 repeatedly with government officials at the highest level, including with President Kumartunga, to express the U.S. Government's concern about the attacks on Christian churches and to discuss the anti-conversion issue. On several occasions the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, Democracy, 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 United States strongly supports 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.

In meetings with clergy and officials in the religious ministries, Embassy representatives encouraged the dialogue and meetings that occur between religious leaders.

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 a land area of 170 square miles, and its population is approximately 76,000. A significant proportion of the population is comprised of citizens of other Caribbean nations, and there is a growing percentage of citizens from China. The dominant religion is Christianity, and the Antigua Christian Council represents the religious beliefs practiced by slightly over 70 percent of the population. The 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 of the population. Religious freedom for others is not restricted, and evangelical churches, along with several small, independent churches, have flourished in recent years. Jehovah's Witnesses have approximately 400 members. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that includes most independent evangelical churches, claims an estimated 25 percent of the population. Recently more than 200 ministers from across the country met with Prime Minister Spencer to provide their suggestions for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs.

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 recently assumed responsibility for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. This previously obscure portfolio within the Ministry of Home Affairs was established upon independence in 1981. Under the new 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 Prime Minister is developing a new mission statement for the Ministry, which is expected to be released in the fall. Until now, the role of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has been to coordinate and facilitate greater interaction between churches, 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. This is being examined by the new government, which is 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 for 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.

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 recent national elections. Prior to voting on March 23, 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.

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. The Constitution, however, 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.

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 are 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. The Government does not collect information on religious affiliation. The Roman Catholic Church claimed 25 million baptized members (approximately 70 percent of the population). Statistics provided by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in 2001 to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief provided the following estimates, which do not necessarily imply active religious practice: Catholics, 88 percent of the population, Protestants, 7 percent, Muslims, 1.5 percent, Jews, 1 percent, and others, 2.5 percent; however, accurate estimates of religious affiliation are difficult to obtain. Available estimates often are based on outdated census data and questionable pre-

sumptions, including a presumption that persons of Middle Eastern origin are Muslim. Estimates of the number of Jews vary between 180,000 and 450,000. The Israeli-Argentine Mutual Association (AMIA) had not undertaken its planned demographic study of the Jewish community by the end of 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. 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."

However, 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 2,800 religious organizations representing about 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.

In September 2003, the press reported that Army Chief Roberto Bendini, in a speech at the Army War College, referred to foreign threats to Patagonian and coastal resources, mentioning activities by certain NGOs and by "small Israeli groups" arriving under a veil of tourism. This raised the specter of the "Plan Andinia," an anti-Semitic myth popular in ultra-nationalist circles in southern South America in the 1970s, which alleged Israeli intentions to take over Patagonia using Israeli soldiers, who would come to the region disguised as tourists. General Bendini denied the substance of the press report and used the opportunity to condemn religious and political discrimination. The Ministry of Defense formed an in-house investigative commission, which quickly issued a report clearing General Bendini. However, human rights advocates questioned, to no effect, irregularities in the Commission's formation and investigation.

To address the perceived anti-Semitism associated with some Argentine military, the Simon Wiesenthal Foundation sponsored lectures at the National Military High School and at the Border Police College. The military has also made a point of sending representatives to Washington Holocaust Memorial activities.

The National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), an independent agency of the Government, is charged with promoting social and cultural pluralism and combating discriminatory attitudes (see Section III). INADI, which includes representatives from 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 conducts educational programs. The agency investigates discrimination complaints, supports victims, and promotes proactive measures to prevent discrimination, which include developing a national plan to combat discrimination. In the past, INADI has suffered from lack of funding and institutional instability; however, its first budget was authorized early in 2004. INADI investigations include a number of incidents of religious discrimination.

On May 12, a federal judge denied legal status to the neo-Nazi New Triumph Party (PNT), arguing that the group's identification with the genocidal and anti-democratic Hitler regime was incompatible with the Constitution. INADI, the Min-

istry of Justice, and Patricia Bullrich's Union for All Party, as well as the Simon Wiesenthal Foundation and the Delegation of Israeli Argentine (i.e. Jewish-Argentine) Associations (DAIA), supported the prosecutor's arguments opposing PNT registry.

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 Id Al Fitr celebrations, and religious activities held by Protestant and Orthodox churches.

In 2000 President De la Rua committed the Government to a Holocaust Education Project to be conducted under the auspices of the International Holocaust Education Task Force (ITF). At a 2002 meeting of the ITF, Argentina became a full member. The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, in conjunction with the Goethe Institute, the City of Buenos Aires, and specialized volunteers, made presentations at secondary schools to promote solidarity and civic courage as exemplified by Wallenberg. In April, the DAIA also concluded an agreement with the City of Buenos Aires under which the organization will provide five publications promoting cultural and religious pluralism for distribution this year to public schools in the city. Two publications have already been distributed.

Several Christian holy days are observed as national holidays: Good Friday, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. The law also 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 are administered by the Secretariat of Worship. They were estimated at roughly $4 million this year, and have been described as compensation for expropriation of properties which belonged to Catholic institutions in the colonial era.

Other religious groups have made allegations of religious discrimination in the military and in certain federal ministries. Several non-Catholic churches have reported lengthy and costly bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining permission for religious activities. However, they were unsure whether this was discriminatory, or simply bureaucratic sluggishness.

Representatives of the Jewish community have claimed in the past that few, if any, Jewish citizens chose to seek employment with the military or selected ministries due to a fear of future discrimination in obtaining higher rank and appointments. Despite such assertions, current and past administrations have included government ministers and other senior officials of the Jewish faith.

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 trial of 15 Buenos Aires provincial police and 5 civilians charged as local accessories in the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center, in which 85 people were killed, is expected to end in August or September. In December 2003, the three-judge panel presiding over the trial recused the investigating judge over concerns he could no longer be impartial, when it was discovered that suspect Carlos Telledin received an unrecorded government payment at about the same time that he provided testimony incriminating provincial police. Two of the four prosecutors were recused in April based on similar concerns.

In August 2003, the investigating judge issued indictments against 8 additional Iranian officials in connection with the AMIA terrorist attack. As a consequence, the former Iranian Ambassador to Argentina, Hadi Soleimanpour, was detained shortly thereafter in Great Britain. Another Iranian diplomat was detained in Belgium but was quickly released when he invoked his diplomatic status. In October 2003, the British released Soleimanpour on the grounds that the evidence presented against him was insufficient to justify his extradition. Upon Soleimanpour's detention, the Iranian government sent legal teams to Argentina and Great Britain to seek information on the evidence against him. Discussion of the case, via third party mediators, was proposed; however, diplomatic efforts to negotiate an approach to the issue ended after Soleimanpour's release.

The AMIA investigation continues under instruction of Federal Judge Rodolfo Cannicoba Corral. The Government has authorized access by plaintiffs to archives of intelligence and security agencies involved in the investigation. Nonetheless, there have been few notable advances during the period covered by this report.

There has been no known progress in the stalled investigation into the 1992 terrorist attack against the Embassy of Israel which resulted in 29 deaths, despite the opening of the investigation's security force archives.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, religious discrimination, especially anti-Semitism, remains a problem. NGOs actively promote interfaith understanding. Ecumenical attendance is 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 (CALIR), the Foundation for Education for Peace (FEDEPAZ), 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, and DAIA, the political representation of Argentine Jewry, to prevent religious tensions stemming from political conflicts in the Middle East.

Most published reports of antireligious acts involved 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 (see Section II).

A number of reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents appeared during the period covered by this report. The DAIA Center for Social Studies publishes an annual study on Anti-Semitism in Argentina. The Center found a total of 177 anti-Semitic incidents in 2003, a figure which is similar to previous years. The report also highlights discrimination against other groups, including members of the Islamic, Rom, Bolivian, Korean, and indigenous communities, disabled persons, and those of a minority sexual orientation. The DAIA report notes that anti-Semitic incidents made up only 7 percent of the complaints received by INADI in 2003, with discrimination against ethnic or migrant groups accounting for 30 percent and against the disabled for 16 percent. Among the anti-Semitic incidents noted were vandalism at Jewish cemeteries in Santa Fe (September 2003) and Posadas, in Misiones Province (November 2003), numerous anti-Semitic remarks, email threats to Jewish institutions, sales of Nazi memorabilia, and graffiti and display of Nazi symbols. The report includes incidents of discrimination against the Muslim and Arab communities in which they were associated with terrorism or violence because of their ethnic or religious background. The DAIA report also highlighted a number of positive events and actions. These included the President's attendance at the 2003 commemoration of the AMIA attack, the review of Government archives related to Nazi immigration, media coverage of Holocaust-related issues, and ecumenical attendance at Jewish holiday or other commemorations.

The Government made no known progress in the investigation of the January 2002 desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the Buenos Aires suburb of Berazategui, the April 2001 letter bomb received by Alberto Merenson, or in other open cases mentioned in prior reports.

The Court has still not scheduled a trial for the third suspect in the 1995 assault by three Buenos Aires youths of a man they believed to be Jewish.

The Government has reported no further progress in the investigation of the 1992 terrorist bombing of the Israeli Embassy. The investigation into the 1994 bombing of the AMIA cultural center continues and has resulted in the issuance of international arrest warrants for twelve Iranian officials and one Lebanese national associated with Hezbollah (see Section II).

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 periodically with various religious leaders and attend events organized by faith-based organizations and NGOs that address questions of religious freedom.

The Embassy continued to provide support for the investigation into the 1994 AMIA bombing. For example, the legal attaché continues to respond to investigative leads in the AMIA case from the federal court charged with the terrorism inquiry.

On an ongoing basis the U.S. Embassy assists the Government's implementation of a Holocaust Education Project, conducted under the auspices of the International Holocaust Education Task Force. For example, in June the Embassy funded air transportation for two teacher trainees to attend Holocaust Education courses in the United States.

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 a total area of 13,939 square miles, and its population is about 340,000, including those residing in the country illegally. 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 illegal immigrants estimated at 40–60,000 persons, and a white/European minority that is nearly as large. The country's religious profile reflects this diversity. Protestant Christian denominations (including Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Evangelicals, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Salvation Army) are in the majority, but there are also significant Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox populations. Smaller Jewish, Baha'i, and Muslim communities also are active. 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. Although 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 and Easter 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, although 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 much 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.

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 several interdenominational organizations and ecumenical movements. These groups freely express their opinions on social, political, and economic issues.

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 established denomination 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 members of 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.

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 exemptions 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 on 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. 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 said they had experienced occasional criticism for their religious beliefs and practices, but generally felt that the society was very tolerant.

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 262,000. There is a growing Mestizo population (46.4 percent), a diminishing Creole component (27.7 percent), a stable Mayan element (10 percent), and a Garifuna component (6.4 percent); the balance of the population (9.5 percent) includes Europeans, East Indians, Chinese, Arabs, and North Americans. Most citizens are Roman Catholic (58 percent). Even when Creoles predominated, Roman Catholicism was the principal faith. At one time, 80 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, which underlies that church's continuing influence in society.

Despite the long period of British colonial rule, only 7 percent of the population is Anglican. Another 6 percent is Pentecostal. Other faiths and denominations each have fewer than 11,000 members. Among them are Methodists (4.2 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (4.1 percent), and Mennonites (4 percent). There are approximately 6,000 Nazarenes, and modest numbers of Hindus, Baha'is, Baptists, Buddhists, members of 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 one of the country's six districts; in Belize district, Catholics hold a plurality, but Anglicans constitute over 27 percent of the population. Approximately 6 percent of citizens identify themselves as nonbelievers or members of no religious congregation.

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 states, "the nation of Belize shall be founded upon principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God." In January 2002, an amendment to the Constitution expanded the appointed Senate to 12 persons, one of whom is to be 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. These holidays do not negatively affect any religious group.

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, separation of church and state is ill-defined in the country's educational system, which 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.

The Constitution also stipulates that no one shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend services without their 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.

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 Terrorists

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 8.27 million. According to a 2001 survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute, 78 percent of the population is Roman Catholic (a decrease of 2 percent over the preceding 10 years). 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. Ap-

proximately 2.5 percent of the population 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. The majority of non-Catholic groups, which includes Mennonites, Mormons, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, and several evangelical groups, also has a foreign missionary presence.

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 Roman Catholic Church tends to be weaker due to a lack of resources and to indigenous cultural resistance. For many individuals, identification with Roman Catholicism coexists 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. During the second half of 2001 and the first 4 months of 2002, the Government registered 11 new religious associations.

There is a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) temple and center in Cochabamba; Mormon sources estimate the number of their adherents in the country at more than 100,000. There is also a small Jewish community with a synagogue in La Paz. Muslims have cultural centers that also serve as mosques in La Paz, and Shi'ite and Sunni mosques are found in the eastern city of Santa Cruz and a smaller mosque is located in Cochabamba. Korean immigrants have their own church in La Paz. The majority of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants has settled in Santa Cruz. There is a university in the city founded by Korean immigrants, which 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 Catholic Church exercises a limited degree of political influence through the Bolivian Bishops' Conference.

In July 2000, then-President Hugo Banzer Suarez signed a Supreme Decree (similar to an executive order) defining the relationships between religious organizations and the Government, which immediately entered into force. It replaced a 1985 decree that had been the subject of criticism by Catholic and non-Catholic churches. The 2000 decree reflects input from the churches, and, according to the Government, was designed to increase transparency and dialogue in Church-State relations. It requires groups to consult civil authorities in order to address potential concerns, such as traffic, before conducting public gatherings such as outdoor celebrations. It also requires that a notary public certify fundraising reports for religious groups. This requirement was designed to protect churches against allegations of money laundering or of receiving money from drug sources.

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. The Government is not known to restrict 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 legal assistance and can be time-consuming. The process has led to the abandonment of a number of pending applications that required further legal revision. During 2001 and the first half of 2002, the Government did not reject any applications; however, it considered 69 previously pending applications to have expired because the applicants had not met additional legal requirements or had not responded to communications from the ministry for 6 months or longer. Religious groups receiving funds from abroad may enter into a framework agreement ("convenio marco") with the Government, lasting 3 years, which permits them to enjoy judicial standing similar to that of other nongovernmental organiza-

tions, and to have tax-free status. Fourteen religious groups, including the Catholic Church, have done so.

Only Catholic religious instruction is provided in public schools. By law it is optional, and it 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."

The Constitution prohibits discrimination in employment based on religion, and it does not appear to be common.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Government denied religious registration to Hari Krishna in the 1980s, on the grounds of what the Government described as non-faith-related activities. Hari Krishna leaders continue to operate a legally registered educational organization.

The Government does not take a very active role in promoting interfaith understanding, although it is represented at interfaith meetings. It works with both 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.

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 ecumenical dialogue between various religious groups continues. In June 1999, the Catholic Church announced that it would no longer call neo-Pentecostal and evangelical churches "sects," which increasingly has been viewed as a pejorative term, but would call them instead "religious organizations." In 1999 Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious leaders initiated an interfaith dialogue. As a demonstration of improving Catholic-Protestant relations, a nationwide meeting of Catholics and Protestants was held in 2000 and again in 2002. Catholic-Protestant meetings at the departmental (state) and national level have continued. In addition the churches encouraged interfaith dialogue at the grass-roots level among their members.

Catholics and Methodists in Cochabamba have collaborated on publications and vigils and, following the Vatican's lead, Catholics and Lutherans in the country now recognize each other's rituals of baptism.

There are no serious rivalries between religious groups, although there were reports of some resentment of missionary groups by Roman Catholics. The country's small Muslim community complained to the Government of discrimination by a minority of citizens in the fall of 2001.

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 officers met regularly with religious authorities, including with officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, with principal religious leaders and with 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 3,286,487 square miles, and its population is approximately 178 million (according to the 2000 census). 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 whom 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 census counted approximately 374,000 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), 25,889 practitioners of Spiritualism, 17,088 adherents of indigenous traditions, and 2,905 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 roughly 1.3 percent of the population, with 2,262,401 followers, according to the 2000 census.

Leaders of the Muslim community estimate that there are from 700,000 to 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 have arrived in the country 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 100,000 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 official, national 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 local 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In April 2003, legal representatives of Umbanda and Candomble spiritist groups sued two Christian Evangelicals for violating the "hate crime" law by distributing evangelistic tracts that allegedly disparaged Iemanja, an African deity, and for proselytizing spiritists at their annual festival in Praia Grande. A judge found the accused guilty of charges and fined them $300 (1,000 reais). The defendants filed a petition to have the decision annulled, claiming precedent-setting implications for religious freedom should Christians be barred from sharing their faith with interested bystanders in a public place. The appeal resulted in a dismissal in favor of the Evangelicals, and, as a result, the fines were overturned.

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 tension between Jewish persons and Muslims. 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. In September 2003, the Supreme Court upheld 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 two years, although this sentence was converted to community service.

There was no reported progress in the investigation of the shooting death in Sao Paulo of the Vertero Catholic bishop in February 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.

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 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 3,855,101 square miles, and its population is approximately 31 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 single religious denomination, followed by Protestant denominations (29 percent). United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and Pentecostal are the largest Protestant denominations. About 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 about 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 of the population. 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 about 21 percent of the population attends church on a weekly basis, and 30 percent said that religion is very important to them.

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 recent years, the Quebec provincial government abolished Catholic and Protestant status for public schools; Quebec now has a linguistically based, secular public school system. In 2001 the Ontario Legislature approved the private school tax credit, and it was enacted in 2002. Subsequently, the Ontario provincial government, which previously had allowed tax credits only for tuition paid to Roman Catholic private schools, allowed tax credits for tuition paid to all private schools, provided such schools satisfy certain educational standards.

In October 2003, Muslims in Ontario created an Islamic Court of Civil Justice, and plans are underway for the body to begin adjudicating cases utilizing Shari'a law. The court, which is legal under the 1991 Ontario Arbitration Act, is composed of religious scholars. They expect to begin ruling shortly on civil disputes between Ontario Muslims, including family disagreements, inheritance disputes, and business and divorce issues.

The Government has designated certain Christian holy days as national holidays: Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter Monday. These holidays do not negatively affect any religious group.

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 January the Supreme Court of Canada heard 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, a condominium association in Montreal barred 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, a local municipality refused to rezone land upon which a group of members of Jehovah's Witnesses wished to build a church hall,

because the land would then be exempt from property taxes. Decisions in these two cases were expected in the summer of 2004.

In September 2003, a 16-year-old Muslim student was expelled from a Quebec private school after refusing to remove her Islamic headscarf. The Quebec Human Rights Commission condemned the girl's expulsion; however, no legal action was taken against the school.

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. Also, the number of anti-Semitic incidents increased during the reporting period.

The B'nai B'rith Canada League for Human Rights received 584 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2003, the highest number in the audit's 21-year history. Incidents included general harassment (389 or 66 percent of reported incidents), vandalism of property (180 or 31 percent), and violence (15 or 3 percent). On April 4, the library of a Jewish elementary school in Montreal was firebombed, and anti-Semitic notes were taped to the building. This event occurred after a string of anti-Semitic vandalism incidents in Toronto in March. In addition a synagogue in Oshawa, Ontario was desecrated in April. Largely in response to these incidents, Justice Minister Cotler announced on April 7 that the Government plans to establish a nationwide plan to combat growing intolerance in society.

In September 2002, pro-Palestinian demonstrators in Montreal assaulted a number of Jews during a riot on the campus of Concordia University when former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to give a speech. Additionally, authorities accused a young skinhead of the July 2002 murder of an orthodox Jew in Toronto. In January an Ontario Court judge ruled that the skinhead must stand trial for first-degree murder; however, no date for the trial had been set by the end of the period covered by this report.

There were expressions of anti-Muslim sentiment, according to the Canadian chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR–CAN). On March 26, a mosque was vandalized in Pickering, Ontario, and anti-Muslim sayings were spray-painted on its walls. According to CAIR–CAN, this incident was the 15th documented act of desecration against an Islamic mosque or institution since September 2001.

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.

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 which the Catholic Church enjoys; however, the Catholic Church unofficially still retains a privileged position.

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 who are 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 are 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 numbers recorded in the 2002 census were members of 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 about 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 Catholic, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches are also 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).

Traditional Protestant churches, including Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed Evangelical, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist are present. There is also a 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 Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status and occasionally receives preferential treatment. In addition to Catholic events, government officials attend major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies.

Before the adoption of the 1999 law, religious faiths and organizations other than the Roman Catholic Church were required to register with the Ministry of Justice to receive tax-exempt status and the right to collect funds. Groups without such juridical status could worship but not enjoy the tax-exempt status, right to collect funds, or other benefits.

The 1999 law on religion allows any religion to obtain legal public right 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 to register have not been satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address those 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 1999 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 mid-year, 404 religious faiths and related organizations had registered under the new law. This number includes the Roman Catholic Church, Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, a wide range of Protestant churches (Evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian), several Buddhist temples, Jewish congregations, Islamic mosques, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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. The Committee continues to meet, seeking to arrive at satisfactory conclusions.

In addition to Christmas and Good Friday, three Roman Catholic holidays are celebrated as national holidays: Corpus Cristi, the Feast of St. Peter and Paul, 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. However, without specific regulations to implement the new law, non-Catholic religious leaders can still be subjected to arbitrary decisions of local administrators. Non-Catholic pastors report that their access to prisons and hospitals was generally good during the period covered by this report; however, they would like their respective faiths to have an official chaplain representing them in these facilities.

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 continues to block efforts by non-Catholic faiths to provide military chaplains. According to one report, in 2002, the base commander on the air force base in the city of Iquique forbade members of the military living on the base from conducting Bible study for children in their homes. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Roman 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. However, in 2001 an ecumenical chapel was opened in the Investigative Police Academy and an Evangelical chaplain was appointed. Two ethics instructors at the Academy are Evangelical. In December 2001, for the first time, the President appointed an Evangelical chaplain to the chapel in the Presidential Palace.

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 is often provided through Sunday schools and other venues. Local school administrations decide how funds are spent on religious instruction; this is predominantly in the Roman Catholic faith. In 2001 the Education and Gospel Task Force in San Pedro de la Paz had to secure a court order to permit an Evangelical teacher to teach religion at the public school. Church leaders also report 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 December 2003, the Ministry of Justice issued an objection to the registration of the Unification Church, on the basis that the Church's doctrine threatens constitutional order. This was the first time under the new law on religion that an organization's registration was contested for other than technical reasons. The Unification Church case currently is being heard in the Santiago Court of Appeals.

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, although they often form on an individual basis to address certain issues. All major faiths participated in a human rights "dialogue table" led by the Defense Minister, which submitted a report to the Government in January 2001.

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 a wide variety of religious leaders, including Santiago's Archbishop and key representatives of evangelical and Jewish organizations. Informal contact is maintained 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 nonsyncretistic 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 is 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 estimates 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-Colombians residing 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 rural 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.

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 adop-

tion 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 juridica) 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 767 of the approximately 2,300 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 guaranteed 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 believe the latter restrictions limit their freedom of religious expression. Congress did not approve the legislation during 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 chaplaincy 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 report 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 complaints of such noncompliance are received.

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 two 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 experiencing 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. Religious groups that have not acceded to the public law agreement may establish parochial schools, provided that 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. These schools are tax-exempt.

In April 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 May 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that university instructors may 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 only recognizes religious marriages celebrated 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 that agreement must first marry in a civil ceremony. Some signatories to the agreement have complained of discrimination at the local level, such as refusals 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 such 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, in practice local governments often exempt only organizations affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. According to the Christian Union Movement, an association of evangelical Christian churches, only 10 municipalities exempt non-Catholic churches from local taxes.

City planning restricts the number of churches in residential areas. Due to its historical presence, the Roman Catholic Church frequently has churches that are many centuries old in prime locations, predate zoning requirements, and therefore are exempted. Protestant denominations often are forced to locate their churches in commercial and industrial zones.

A small Taoist commune exists in a mountainous rural region of Santander Department. Through its web site, the community has asserted that it is harassed by government security forces. Government officials claim to have received reports that the commune holds residents against their will. The number of commune residents is unknown, although it is accepted widely that many are foreigners. The community's insularity and isolation in a region with a significant guerrilla presence make it difficult to gather accurate information.

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 FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), ELN (National Liberation Army), and AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) have been designated foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. Secretary of State, under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). 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 reported that it was investigating the murders 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 Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church reported that terrorist groups killed at least 40 Catholic priests (including a bishop and an archbishop) between 1987 and 2003. The Presidential Program for Human Rights reported that terrorist groups killed seven priests in 2003. Nearly all these killings were attributed to leftist guerrillas, particularly the FARC. According to the Colombian Evangelical Council of Churches (CEDECOL), at least 115 evangelical church leaders have been killed in the past 3 years. Colombian nongovernmental organization (NGO) Justapaz reported that 40 evangelical church leaders were assassinated in 2003. Roman Catholic and Protestant church leaders state that killings of religious leaders in rural communities are generally underreported because of the communities' isolation and a 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 report that evangelical church leaders are targeted nationwide for violence 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 March 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.

On November 10, 2003, the body of Father Jose Rubin Rodriguez, who had been kidnapped a week earlier by armed guerrillas, was found in Tame, Arauca Department.

On October 29, 2003, the criminal trial of FARC commander John Fredy Jimenez and hired gunman Alexander de Jesus Zapata began. They were accused of committing the March 2002 murder of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cali, Isaias Duarte. The trial was still in progress at the end of the period covered by this report.

In July 2003, the AUC reportedly killed Dario Cardona, an evangelical church leader in Dagua, Valle Department. At the time, paramilitaries alleged that Cardona was a FARC collaborator.

Religious leaders and practitioners were the targets of threats and kidnappings, primarily by guerrilla groups.

For example, on March 22, Father Fajib Alvarez, a priest in Barranquilla, announced that he had received threatening phone calls from a person claiming to be a member of the FARC. He was given 24 hours to leave the area. Alvarez stated that this was the third time in seven years that he had received this kind of threat.

On March 19, Father Cesar Pena, a parish priest in a community outside of Valdivia, Antioquia Department, was kidnapped by alleged FARC guerillas. He was still missing at the end of the period covered by this report.

On February 19, Father Ramon Rodriguez, a parish priest in Paniquita, Cauca Department, was attacked by alleged guerillas, who stole his vehicle. He suffered severe leg injuries.

On February 14, the FARC released Father Carlos Enrique Salazar, who was taken hostage at a roadblock near Almaguer, Cauca Department hours earlier as part of a FARC attempt to carry out a mass kidnapping. Salazar had publicly pressed for the release of kidnapping victims.

On September 20, 2003, a group of armed men kidnapped Eveiro Pechene, a leader of the Christian Alliance Church, and Arvey Velarde, a leader of the World Missionary Movement, along with four others in Cajibio, Cauca Department. All six are still missing.

In 2003 the Presidential Program for Human Rights registered three kidnappings of Roman Catholic clergy. Justapaz reported five kidnappings of evangelical church leaders the same year.

The Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church reported that 63 Catholic churches have been seriously damaged or destroyed in the last decade, including 5 churches since January 2003. Roman Catholic churches generally are not attacked intentionally, but often they are affected by guerrilla attacks on police stations and mayors' offices located nearby.

According to the Christian Union Movement, advances by Colombian security forces against the FARC have resulted in the re-opening of approximately 350 of the more than 450 evangelical churches closed as of August 2002. However, guerrillas and paramilitaries continue to attack rural evangelical churches and schools because they suspect the churches are fronts for U.S. Government activities. Mormon church leaders and facilities remain under threat for the same reason.

Due to threats from guerrillas or, frequently, paramilitaries, many religious authorities were forced to refrain from publicly discussing the country's internal con-

flict. 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' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church 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 have 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.

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 Catholic Church officials. The 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. The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion; however, persons of all denominations freely practice their religion without government interference.

There was no fundamental change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, although certain legal and administrative liberalization took place. 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 19,730 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.3 million.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion, 69 percent of the population is Catholic, with 40 percent of that figure actively practicing Catholicism. A September 2003 CID-Gallup poll found that an estimated 18 percent belong to non-Catholic Christian churches. Approximately 1 percent practiced non-Christian faiths and 12 percent practiced no religion at all. Protestant Christian denominations include the Methodist, Baptist, Evangelical, and Episcopal Churches. Other groups include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists. A Mormon temple in San Jose 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, attracting 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, Scien-

tology, Tenrikyo, and the Baha'i Faith, claim membership throughout the country with the majority of worshippers residing in the Central Valley. On the southern Atlantic coast, several small indigenous tribes practice animism.

The country's tradition of tolerance and professed pacifism has attracted many religious groups. The Jewish population constitutes less than 1 percent of the country's total. Many of its members found refuge here 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 welcomed this community, as well as those of Mennonites, Beechy Amish, and other pacifist 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.

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. Members of all denominations freely practice their religion without government interference. In the event of a violation of religious freedom, the victim's remedy is to file a lawsuit with the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, which may order the defendant to pay a fine, serve jail time, or compensate the plaintiff for such discrimination.

There is no general tax exoneration for the Catholic Church or any other church; there is an exoneration only for real estate that is used directly for worship by any religious organization. The blanket exoneration previously enjoyed by the Catholic Church was amended in 1992. The amended 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.

The Government does not inhibit the establishment of religious groups through taxation or special licensing requirements for religious organizations. Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, groups must incorporate to have legal standing, like any other organization, and must have a minimum of twelve members. Also, religious groups must register with the Justice Department if they will be involved in any type of fundraising activity.

Various Catholic religious holidays are considered national holidays; these include St. Joseph's Day, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, St. Peter and St. Paul's Day, Our Lady of Los Angeles, All Soul's Day, the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, and Christmas. However, if an individual wishes to observe another religious holiday, the Labor Code provides the necessary flexibility for that observance upon the employer's approval.

Although not mandatory, Catholic religious instruction is provided in the public schools. 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 the time of the Catholic instruction. 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. This certification is not required of public school educators who do not teach religion. Denominational and nondenominational private schools are free to offer any religious instruction they choose. Parents do not have the option of home schooling their children.

Only officials of the Catholic Church can officiate marriages that are automatically recognized by the state. Other religious groups can perform wedding ceremonies, but the marriage must then be legalized with a civil union. Couples may also choose to have only a civil ceremony.

In addition the Government traditionally affords the Catholic Church an opportunity to participate in social, economic and political events. In the spring and summer of 2003, the Catholic Church was involved actively in negotiations to end labor strikes and signed a manifesto against child labor. In October 2003, it requested the Legislative Assembly to annul a 1999 Presidential Decree allowing voluntary steri-

lization. During negotiations for the Central American Free Trade Agreement in fall 2003, the Catholic Church expressed concern for the social implications of the agreement and proposed to act as facilitator for an internal country dialogue. In March it announced plans to initiate a multiyear dialogue between members of the Government, the Catholic Church, and civil society to analyze five themes the Catholic Church believes are fundamental to national development: economic solidarity, political reform, education reform, ethics of development, and combating poverty.

The Government does not restrict the establishment of places of worship. All such applications are submitted to the local municipality and must comply with safety and noise regulations. New churches, primarily evangelical Protestant churches that are located in residential neighborhoods, occasionally have conflicts with local governments due to neighbors' complaints about noise and traffic. Some churches reportedly have been closed by municipalities, health departments, or police as a result. In contrast established Catholic Churches often were built around a municipal square and rarely present such problems.

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 religious individuals serving in political office. A Government decree of October 23, 2003 facilitates the entry of representatives of all religions to prisons and hospitals in order to minister to their members.

Foreign missionaries and clergy of all denominations work and proselytize freely. Mormons have the most active mission program, with 37 missionaries currently in country. 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.

While the required oath for government service includes the phrase "before God and country," an alternate oath is available to those who choose to use it.

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

On October 23, 2003, President Pacheco signed two bills into law granting equal access to hospitals and prisons for representatives of all religions. Prior to this legislation, only the Catholic Church had been guaranteed unrestricted access. Representatives of other religions had been required to follow routine procedures for the general public to gain entrance, which could be strict and cumbersome. Some Protestant ministers had been able to reach agreements with hospitals allowing their unrestricted entrance; however, hospital directors could revoke it at any time. These bills, introduced by a Protestant minister representing a political party in the Legislative Assembly, also create a legal framework for the establishment and operation of non-Catholic religious groups, including accreditation of their officials.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The country has a history of tolerance.

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. Embassy officials have met with the Archbishop of San Jose to discuss economic, social and labor issues, and have also communicated with other religious leaders and faith-based nongovernmental organizations as issues warrant. The Embassy coordinates with the Ministry of Foreign Relation's 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 places 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 two 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, and also faced pressures from registered religious groups. The Government's policy of permitting apolitical religious activity 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 to increase due to the establishment of house churches, which some churches believed was divisive.

The U.S. Government has raised issues of human rights, including religious discrimination and harassment, with Government officials; however, the Government has dismissed these concerns. The U.S. Government continues to urge international pressure on the Government to cease its repressive practices. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana continues to maintain regular contact with various religious leaders.

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 share or have participated in syncretistic Afro-Caribbean beliefs, such as Santeria. 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, though 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 members of Jehovah's Witnesses and the small Jewish community, do not belong to the CCC.

Although much of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, historically the country has been a largely secular society without an especially strong religious character. 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. The Seventh-day Adventists claim about 30,000 persons. Prior to 2001, church attendance had grown in 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. It has since stabilized at levels lower than the 1999 peak, but they remain 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. 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). However, in practice the Government appears to have halted registration of new denominations, although no groups were known to have applied for and been denied registration during the period covered by this report.

Registration allows church officials to obtain official permission to travel abroad and receive foreign visitors, to receive imported religious literature through the CCC, and to 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 extra-legal means, and risk closure of their technically illegal meeting places.

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' applications for legal recognition, thereby subjecting members of such groups to potential charges of illegal association, though no such charges had been filed by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government's main interaction with religious denominations is through the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party. The Ministry of Interior still engages in efforts to control and monitor the country's religious institutions, including surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of religious professionals and laypersons. In January an independent journalist interviewed a former Ministry of the 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. This is because 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 Government.

The Government has relaxed restrictions on most officially recognized religious denominations. Members of 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, although there continued to be sporadic reports of harassment by local Communist Party and government officials. The Government has authorized small assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses and one large gathering of as many as 7,000 persons in March 2003. 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 only be distributed to officially recognized religious groups. The CCC controls distribution of Bibles to its members and to other officially recognized denominations. The CCC reports that it has distributed 1.5 million Bibles since 1998. Bibles are distributed among denominations according to the number of members of each church.

Several Catholic diocese and lay groups publish magazines, including "Palabra Nueva" (New Word) of the Archdiocese of Havana and "Vitral" (Stained Glass Window) 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 Gov-

ernment has accused the editor of one religious magazine of subversive behavior for writing about sensitive political and social issues.

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.

During the period covered by this report, the Government allowed 9 foreign priests and 18 foreign nuns 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 Conference of Catholic Bishops estimates that some applications have been pending for two to three years, and some names are eventually dropped from the list altogether. A request from the Conference of Catholic Bishops for the Government to permit 15 Catholic orders to establish a presence was also pending at the end of the period covered by this report, which the bishops argue limits the training of Catholic seminarians.

In September 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. Fr. Fuentes left the country on September 30, 2003. Earlier in 2003, authorities revoked authorization for Fuentes to hold a procession marking 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.

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 1965–67 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. Although the Government abandoned its official atheism in the early 1990s, most churches had been weakened seriously, and active participation in religious services fell 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.

In February 2003, the Archbishop of Havana issued a pastoral letter lamenting the disintegration of Cuban families and the extreme pressure to emigrate, and called upon the Government to shift from "policies of vengeance" to "policies of compassion."

In March 2003, the Cuban Conference of Catholic Bishops issued an open letter in the Italian magazine "30 Giorni" criticizing the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party for strict controls over the activities of the Catholic Church, especially restrictions on religious education and Church access to the mass media. In September 2003, the Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a document accusing the Government of imposing tighter restrictions on the Church and on society since the visit of Pope John Paul II, and calling on the Government to show clemency toward political prisoners.

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 Cuban Conference of Catholic Bishops indicated that the Church declines to register because registration would force it to concede control to the State regarding the content and format of Church publications. 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 must also 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 govern-

ment outlets is lengthy and expensive. 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 Patriarch Bartholomew's visit as "proof" that Amnesty International's criticism of religious restrictions was a "lie."

In 2001 the Italian news agency ANSA reported that provincial leaders of the Communist Party requested the authorities to ensure that the charitable work and donations provided by religious groups be limited. The party officials apparently believed that churches, especially the Catholic Church, had gained community support, which threatened the continued rule of the Communist Party through such activities. Following the publication of the article, Communist Party leaders in Havana reportedly apologized to the Catholic Church hierarchy.

Following complaints in 2000 by Pentecostals regarding unauthorized foreign missionaries (see Section III), the CCC has continued to request that overseas member church organizations assist them in controlling foreign missionaries and prohibiting them from establishing unauthorized Pentecostal churches. In May 2004, Reineiro Arce, the influential former president of the CCC, claimed that up to 70 foreign religious groups had established themselves in recent years by "taking advantage of the difficult economic situation and giving a pastor up to $100 a month." He claimed these new groups are part of a U.S. Government strategy to subvert the Government, and that the groups are not churches, but "sects and groups that come to destroy the work of the church."

Religious officials are allowed to visit prisoners; however, prison officials sometimes refuse visits to certain political prisoners. In September 2003, officials at Kilo 8 Prison in Camaguey Province threatened to suspend family visits for nine political prisoners who read aloud to each other from the Bible. 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.

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 any church at other than the official—and exorbitant—retail price. In addition the Government denies access to the Internet to some religious groups, including the Catholic Church, which 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 five years for permission to have Internet access; however, permission is always denied.

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. In the past, students who professed a belief in religion were stigmatized by other students and teachers and were disciplined formally for wearing crucifixes or for bringing Bibles or other religious materials to school. In some cases, these students were prohibited from attending institutions of higher learning or from studying specific fields; however, recently students who profess a belief in religion have been permitted to attend institutions of higher education.

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.

Church officials have encountered 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.

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 July 2003, Communist Party officials in the city of East Havana barred a procession for the feast day of the Virgin of Carmen because the parish priest was a friend of Christian Liberation Movement leader Oswaldo Paya. Communist Party officials told the priest that he should inform his congregation that the Government had barred the procession specifically because of his friendship with Paya.

In September 2003, the Government permitted for the sixth 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 a total of 50 processions nationwide to mark the feast day of Our Lady of Charity, but denied permission to 14 others because the latter were more politically and socially vocal, and therefore were not in line with government policy.

There were smaller, local processions throughout the provinces during the period covered by this report. For example, the Government permitted a May 2004 procession in the town of Managua which drew hundreds of participants.

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.

The Ministry of the Interior continues to engage in efforts to control and monitor religious activities, and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups and religious professionals and lay persons. There were continued sporadic 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 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 Conference of Catholic Bishops estimates that the number of State Security Agents attending Mass for the purpose of intimidating spouses of political prisoners has been growing. There are also reports of prison officials changing the dates and times that wives may telephone their spouses to Sunday morning, thereby forcing the spouses to choose between speaking with their spouses or attending Mass.

In June 2004, the Government prohibited La Pastora Catholic Church in Santa Clara from distributing donated medicine and soap. Government officials advised the church that such activities are not authorized and resulted in illegal public gatherings.

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.

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 40 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 to increase 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 (see Section II).

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 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 maintains regular contact with the various religious leaders and communities, and supports nongovernmental organization initiatives that aid religious groups. The U.S. Government regularly seeks to facilitate travel to and from the country by religious persons, and delivery of donated goods and materials that in some cases are provided to religious institutions. The U.S. Interests Section has raised issues of human rights, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials; however, the Government has dismissed these concerns. The Interests Section reports on cases of religious discrimination and harassment, and the U.S. Government continues to urge international pressure on the Government to cease its repressive practices.

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 about 61 percent of the population. In recent years, many individuals have joined Evangelical churches. According to the 2001 Population and Housing Census, Evangelical churches currently 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.

Minority religions and denominations, which range in number from 1.6 percent to 0.2 percent of the population, include Rastafarianism, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Anglicans, and Muslims. According to the census, 1.4 percent of the population is identified as adhering to "other" religions, including Baptist, Nazarian, Church of Christ, Brethren Christian, and the Baha'i faith. Six percent of the population is identified as having no religion. The Muslim community, which consists mostly of foreign students, is financing 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 reporting period, 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 then must register as non-profit organizations with the Attorney General. Non-profit 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 church claimed to have applied for permission in September 2003 to operate and proselytize, but the request had not yet 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, as well as 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 reporting period. According to the church's law firm, the church wrote letters on the matter and met with the Attorney General in April, seeking to rebut unfavorable reports concerning the church that the Attorney General had received from outside sources, including the police.

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 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 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 8,716,000.

The largest religious denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christians (especially Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a much smaller but generally growing presence. Many Catholics also practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (Santeria) or witchcraft (brujeria), but because these practices rarely are admitted openly, the number of adherents is impossible to estimate. Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism are practiced. There are synagogues in Santo Domingo and Sosua, and there is one rabbi in the country. Although there are no mosques, a group of foreign-born Muslims gather weekly in the capital for informal prayer services.

According to Demos 97, a population survey taken in 1997 by the Instituto de Estudios de Poblacion y Desarrollo, the population was nominally 68.1 percent Roman Catholic and 11 percent Protestant (under which category the survey grouped evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and traditional Protestants). In the same study, 20.1 percent of the sample said they had no religion. However, evangelical Christians claim 20 to 25 percent of the population, while the Catholic Church claims 87 percent.

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 religions. 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. Such groups other than the Catholic Church must request exemptions from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. This process can be lengthy; however, no requests for tax exemption were denied during the period covered by this report. Evangelical Protestant leaders have lobbied the Government periodically to equalize the privileges their churches receive with those granted to the Catholic Church. Currently, Roman Catholic weddings are the only religious marriage ceremonies that the Government legally recognizes, although civil unions are legal as well.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The National Police strongly encouraged its members to attend Catholic Mass, but they are allowed to practice their own beliefs. The country's Catholic Cardinal is the Army Chaplain for the Armed Forces and the Police, and holds the rank of Major General. There are no chaplains that represent any other religious group.

A 2000 law required 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.

Foreign missionaries are not subject to special restrictions. There were no reports that the Government discriminated against missionaries of any religious affiliation.

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. No religious group complained of discrimination during the reporting 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.

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 approximately 3,200 religious groups, churches, societies, Christian fraternities, and foundations.

Together with the military 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, especially 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.

Some multidenominational Christian groups, such as the Gospel Missionary Union, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice, have been active for many years. Other active Protestant groups include the Evangelical Group, World Vision, and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which operates in remote areas with the goal of translating the Bible into indigenous languages.

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), members of 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.

The following groups are present in relatively small numbers: Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Rosicrucians, the Unification Church, and the Church of Scientology, as well as adherents of the Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Assemblies of God, Episcopalian, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches. There are also followers of Inti, the traditional Inca sun god, and some atheists.

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 $40 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 religions.

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. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government 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 more than 6 million.

The country is predominantly Roman Catholic, with a sizeable Protestant minority. There are also small communities representing the Seventh-day Adventist, Jewish, Hare Krishna, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Muslim faiths, among others. A very small segment of the population practices a native religion. According to a 2003 survey by the Technological University Public Opinion Center, approximately 57.1 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Additionally, 21.2 percent belong to Protestant churches. Among Protestants, informal church estimates suggest approximately 35 percent are Baptists and members of Assemblies of God. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses accounted for an estimated 1.9 percent of the population, 0.7 percent are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 2.3 percent was associated with other churches and religious groups, and 16.8 percent was not affiliated with any church or religion. The predominance of the Catholic Church does not negatively affect the religious freedom of other groups. Several Protestant missionary groups 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. 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 Non-Profit Organizations and Foundations law says such groups may register for official status. A religious group does not have to register with the Government, but must if it wants to formally incorporate. The Civil Code gives equal status to churches as non-profit foundations. For formal recognition, they must apply through the General Office of Non-Profit Associations and Foundations (DGFASFL) within the Ministry of Governance. Each church 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 it can certify a church, the DGFASFL must determine that its constitution and bylaws do not violate the law. Once certified, the church must publish the DGFASFL approval and its constitution and bylaws in the official government gazette.

The Non-Profit Organizations and Foundations law charges the Ministry of Governance with registering, regulating, and overseeing the finances of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), non-Catholic churches, and other religious groups in the country. The law specifically exempts unions, cooperatives, and the Catholic Church. During the period covered by this report, the DGFASFL reported 103 requests for new registration; 83 were approved and 20 are pending.

The regulations implementing the tax law grant tax-exempt status to recognized religious groups. The regulations also make donations to recognized churches tax-deductible.

A 1940 law establishes Holy Week as a holiday 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.

Foreign nationals seeking to actively promote 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 in the country. 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. The Human Rights Ombudswoman's Office reported no claims of discrimination or persecution 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 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 National Conference of Churches, an interfaith organization created to promote religious tolerance and to coordinate church-sponsored social pro-

grams, has been inactive for more than two years. Although discussions began in early 2002 to restart the organization, no action had been taken by the end of 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. The U.S. Government maintains a regular dialogue with principal religious leaders, church officers, church-sponsored universities, and NGOs. Additionally, the U.S. Embassy sponsors trips to the United States, such as those 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 two smaller islands, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, have an area of 133 square miles and a population of slightly over 100,000. The population is almost entirely of African, East Indian, and European descent. About 93,000 persons live on the island of Grenada, 7,000 live 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. Recently 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 about 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 city or region. Well over 60 percent of the population regularly participates in formal religious services, and that percentage rises during major Christian holidays.

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 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 the issuing of licenses for religious groups, buildings, and events. Religious groups must register with the Government. They are entitled to some customs exemptions, for example, 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. Recently there have been numerous activities to promote greater understanding among 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. U.S. Embassy representatives discussed issues and events involving religious freedom with government officials when soliciting support for international organization resolutions regarding broader human rights concerns.

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. However, the Government has not implemented provisions of the Peace Accords regarding the rights of indigenous people that protect the exercise of indigenous religious beliefs and practices.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, traditional Mayan leaders 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 million. Official census data indicates that the country's indigenous population is 42 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 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 formally does not accept the practice of Mayan religions, has generally tolerated traditional practices that do not directly 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. However, evangelical Protestants appear to be represented in greater proportion in the Guatemalan Republican Front, which was the governing party from 2000 to 2004.

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 has not implemented the 1995 Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which provides for the respect of spiritual rights of indigenous people. The agreement calls for Congress to pass legislation to amend the Constitution to "recognize, respect, and protect the distinct forms of spirituality practiced by the Maya, Garifuna, and Xinca" groups. While the previous Congress passed a law containing 50 proposed constitutional amendments, including this one, the package was defeated in a 1999 popular referendum, and no further efforts have been made within Congress to amend the Constitution.

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 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 the Guatemalan Migration (Ministry of Immigration), foreign missionaries are required to obtain a tourist visa, which is issued for a period of 3 months and is renewable. After renewing their tourist visa once, they may apply for temporary residence. Specific missionary visas are no longer issued or required.

The Government does not subsidize religious groups, and no groups report 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. In the last year, the Ministry of Education has consulted with Protestant groups on the integration of general values, although not specific religious teachings, into school curriculum.

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

While there is no government policy of discrimination, a lack of resources and political will to enforce existing laws and implement the Peace Accords limits the free expression of indigenous religious practice. Indigenous leaders state that Mayan culture does not receive the official recognition that it is due. The Government has not provided mechanisms for indigenous control of or free access to ceremonial sites considered sacred within indigenous culture. Individuals seeking to practice traditional religious ceremonies at sites considered sacred must pay an entrance fee or request permission far in advance from the Historical Anthropological Institute (a division of the Ministry of Culture). The Government's use of sacred sites as revenue-generating tourist destinations is considered by some indigenous groups to be an affront to their spiritual rights. In October 2001, the Government swore in the Commission for the Definition of Sacred Places to address such issues. However, the Commission has not taken action to open, or restrict, any sacred sites to religious use since its establishment. Often, individuals who wish to hold religious ceremonies in sacred sites must pay an entrance fee or request permission from the Ministry of Culture many weeks or months in advance.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Widespread impunity in the justice sector restricts the investigation of crimes that could have had religious motivations. There were multiple reports of killings of religious leaders of various denominations during the period covered by this report; however, there is no evidence to suggest that the killings were related to the individuals' religious affiliation or practices.

An appeal remains pending in the Constitutional Court of the June 2001 conviction of three military officers and an assistant priest for the 1998 murder of Bishop Juan Gerardi, the Coordinator of the Archbishop's Office on Human Rights (ODHA). In October 2002, an appeals court annulled the 2001 conviction and ordered a retrial, which the ODHA immediately appealed to the Supreme Court. In February, the Supreme Court Appellate Chamber confirmed the 2001 conviction, a decision that the defense then appealed to the Constitutional Court. The prosecution is currently awaiting decision on an appeal filed with the Third Appeals Court in January, requesting that the Fourth Penal Court be recused from hearing the case.

In April 2003, human rights activist and Mayan priest Diego Xon Salazar was murdered in Chichicastenango, Quiche Province. Xon Salazar had reportedly received multiple death threats related to his work denouncing the resurgence of the civilian defense patrols (ex-PACS) in the Quiche. During the investigation conducted by the Special Prosecutor's Office for Human Rights, prosecutors theorized that Xon Salazar was killed because of an interfamilial land dispute. Prosecution was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In May 2003, Mayan priest Gerardo Camo Manuel was killed during a religious ceremony in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz Province, after reportedly receiving death threats from one or more members of his community. The only witness in the case was unable to identify a suspect, and the case currently is closed.

In December 2003, a controversial Catholic priest well known for his financial support of the poor, José María Ruiz Furlan was killed in Guatemala City. Prosecutors discounted religious motives and were investigating Furlan's business ties at the end of the period covered by this report.

In October 2002, Mayan spiritual leader Antonio Pop Caal was kidnapped and killed in Coban, Alta Verapaz Province. Seven individuals were arrested after trying to ransom Pop Caal for profit. The case is scheduled to go to trial in February 2005.

In December 2002, Mayan priest Marcos Sical Perez was killed by assailants in Salama, Baja Verapaz Province, allegedly in relation to an attempted car theft. The suspects' trial continued at the end of the reporting period.

In March Reverend Ron Retner, an American Lutheran missionary, was threatened in a neighborhood of Guatemala City after trying to enter the community to preach. The threats allegedly were related to a dispute between the Lutheran Church and community members over land owned by the Church.

Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini and Catholic priest Bernando Castro reportedly received death threats during the period covered by this report due to their activism in support of indigenous land rights.

While these crimes have not been linked to religious persecution, they represent a disturbing trend of targeting voices of religious leaders who dissent against the corruption and impunity that plague society, and reflect poorly on the ability of the justice sector to swiftly investigate and prosecute violent crime.

There were no reports of state agents monitoring the activities of religious leaders.

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, with the exception of widespread intolerance of Mayan "spirituality" and the practice of indigenous religious rituals. According to leaders of the Catholic, evangelical Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim communities, complaints from their followers of discrimination based on religion are rare.

The indigenous people historically have been dominated by the Ladinos (citizens of European descent), and generally have been excluded from the mainstream of social, economic, and political activity. Much of the Ladino community has long regarded indigenous people with disdain. Reports of discrimination against traditional religious practices must be viewed in the context of this widespread Ladino rejection of indigenous culture.

Mayan religious leaders 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. Many Catholic churches are 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, local evangelical leaders often denounce traditional religious practices as "witchcraft" or "devil worship," and actively discourage 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, especially Mayan religious practices, and a minority group, which actively promotes an ecumenical and multicultural vision.

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. In addition the Ecumenical Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, a coalition of the Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, and Presbyterian faiths, was founded in April 2002 when it announced its intent to begin monitoring government efforts to fulfill the Peace Accords, particularly on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Ecumenical Forum sponsored public conferences and debates on these topics throughout the country. However, Protestant denominations who are not members strongly opposed 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. 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 Agency for International Development (USAID) supports bilingual education based on the Mayan worldview, including core spiritual values for indigenous children. USAID also supports the Commission against Discrimination and Racism, which fights discrimination against Mayan religious practitioners. The Embassy has promoted dialogue between leaders of Mayan and Ladino groups within civil society and within diverse religious com-

munities, and has also 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 groups of native South Americans and persons of European and Chinese descent, practice a wide range of religions.

Approximately 50 percent of the population is either practicing or nominally Christian; of this group, roughly one-third is Anglican, one-quarter Roman Catholic, one-quarter Pentecostal and Baptist, and one-fifth Seventh-day Adventist. There are approximately 42 Presbyterian congregations, each ranging from 30 to 80 members. There are an estimated 3,000 Methodists in the country, and smaller numbers of Lutherans, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and members of Jehovah's Witnesses. Practicing or nominal Hindus comprise approximately 35 percent of the population, and Muslims (both Sunni and Shi'a) constitute an estimated 10 percent. There is a small number of Baha'is. Although not included in official figures, many persons practice Rastafarianism or a traditional Caribbean religion known locally as "Obeah," either apart from or in conjunction with the practice of other faiths. The country has a small Jewish population. Approximately 2 percent of the population do not belong to any religion.

Members of all ethnic groups are well represented in all religious groups, with two exceptions: almost all Hindus are Indo-Guyanese, while 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 has required missionaries to pay income taxes, even if that income was derived from abroad. Exemptions from taxation were granted for maintenance stipends paid by churches. Missionaries who produced evidence of previously granted income tax exemptions were not required to pay back taxes. It appears that enforcement of this tax requirement was motivated as a revenue measure, was not intended to limit missionary activity, and was not applied in a discriminatory manner.

The Government recognizes religious groups of all faiths present. All churches are required to register with the Government in order to be formally recognized. Currently, such registration is done under the Companies Act, although some groups were previously 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 Amerindian Affairs. The ministries review the scope of activities submitted by the religious body

and grant approval on a case-by-case basis. There is no formal monitoring of religious groups.

The following religious holy days are national holidays: Christian: Good Friday, Easter, Christmas; Hindu: Phagwah, Diwali; Muslim: Youman Nabi, and Eid-ul-Adha. None of these holidays negatively affect any other religious group.

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, no proposal from religious bodies to participate has been submitted. A nongovernmental umbrella organization for Christian, Hindu, and Muslim organizations exists, called the Inter-Religious Organization, which occasionally speaks out on religious and social issues, although its activities are limited because the groups meets infrequently, and not all denominations are included in its voluntary membership.

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, although 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. Although membership in a particular religion does not confer any advantage or disadvantage, general military practice tends to be biased in favor of Christians. For example, no allowance is made for Muslim observance of Friday as a 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 have frequently 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 Ambassador and other Embassy officials met on numerous occasions with leaders of religious groups and with foreign missionaries. The U.S. Embassy pursues 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. 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, found in 309 Catholic parishes throughout the 9 departmental dioceses, a decrease from the roughly 80 percent who were Catholic traditionally. 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, members of 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. Although the Government officially recognized Voodoo as a religion in 2003, it continues to be frowned upon by elite, conservative Catholics and 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. A Protestant pastor leads a political party, the Christian Movement for a New Haiti (MOCHRENA). Several Catholic priests were 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 occasionally issues statements on political matters and in 2003, along with the Protestant Federation, actively participated in the search for a solution to the political impasse between the Government and opposition forces.

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, Cults (Religious Affairs), and Haitians Living Abroad. 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. Although many nondenominational Christian groups and voodoo practitioners have not sought official status, there were no reports of any instance in which this requirement has 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 an attempt 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 Ca-

tholicism 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 clergy is now invited to participate when churches are 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 one 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 in order to register with the Bureau of Religious Affairs. While some missionaries were concerned by the slowness of the Government 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 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. Given 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. Embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their cooperation in the political process. Throughout 2003 the Embassy worked closely with the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Protestant Federation, and the Episcopal Church in search of a resolution of the country's political impasse. Each of these organizations has a seat on the recently formed Provisional Electoral Council, with which the Embassy worked regularly in preparing for elections.

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 country's 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 Catholic Church reports a total membership of just over 80 percent of the population.

In January 2002, the Le Vote Company conducted interviews on religious issues with persons age 18 or older in 1,215 households throughout the country. The company 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 over time. The principal faiths include: Roman Catholicism, the Greek Orthodox rite, the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mennonite Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and some 300 evangelical Protestant churches. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Grand Commission churches. The National Association of Evangelical Pastors represents the evangelical leadership. There are a significant number of Christian missionaries from the United States. There are small numbers of Muslims and Jewish persons. There is a mosque and a synagogue in San Pedro Sula, and a synagogue, which opened in the last year, 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 Roman Catholic patron saint. The Government consults with the Roman 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 State Solicitor'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 of the Ministry of Government and Justice turning down any application for juridical personality 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 parochial 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 reporting period.

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 September 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, this legislation has 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 of the country to terrorist activities; this, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of 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 nongovernmental 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 2,653,000. 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 category "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.

The Parliament may freely act to recognize a religious group. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison; however, registration is not mandatory.

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. These holidays do not adversely affect any religious group.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2003 the Government recognized Rastafarianism as a religion. Members of the Rastafarian community have complained 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 February 2003, the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on marijuana recommended decriminalization of possession of small quantities for adult personal use in private. The committee's recommendations have not yet 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. 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.

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 May, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) incorporated the principles of religious tolerance into a seminar to bring together leaders from various religious groups to forge a connection between faith and environmental issues. The event was designed to increase awareness of environmental issues by encouraging each citizen to recognize his or her role as an environmental steward and custodian of nature. More than 100 participants representing the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Rastafarian, Hindu, Jewish, and Baha'i faiths attended. The gathering provided a forum for participants of differing religious persuasions to highlight the areas of common ground among them that relate to caring for nature.

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.

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 2000 census, approximately 88 percent of respondents identify 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: Pentecostal and Neopentecostal evangelicals, 1.62 percent of the population; other Protestant evangelical groups, 2.87 percent; members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1.25 percent; "historical" Protestants, 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 3.53 percent of respondents indicated "no religion," and 0.85 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. 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. Press reports have

estimated that there are more than 5,000 Protestant churches and 7,000 pastors in the country.

Non-Catholic Christians are concentrated primarily in the south. Chiapas, 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 have been converted through the Mission for Dawa in Mexico, an Islamic sect recently founded by Spanish missionaries.

In early 2002, a Roman Catholic Church official in Chiapas told the press that an estimated 12 percent of that state's residents identified themselves as "non-believers," 64 percent as Roman Catholic, and 22 percent as Protestant evangelical. In indigenous communities in Chiapas, the number of Catholics is even lower. A December 2001 article reported that in the Chol area, 56.3 percent identify themselves as Roman Catholic, in the Tzeltal, 54.7 percent, and in the Tzotzil, 51.9 percent.

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, especially in the south, there is a correlation between politics and religion. A small number of local leaders often are reported to manipulate religious tensions in their communities for their own political or economic benefit, especially in Chiapas (see Sections II and III).

According to news reports in 2000, an estimated 55 percent of those surveyed attend religious ceremonies at least weekly; 19 percent, monthly; and 20 percent, less than once a month.

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 infringe on religious freedom, especially in the south.

The Constitution states that everyone is 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 August 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 Director for Religious Affairs of the Federal Secretariat of Government (DAR). The registration process is routine. The most recent statistics show that 6,247 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 215 associations, some of which had applied for registration previously. In addition 142 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, to receive tax exemptions, and to hold religious meetings outside of their places of worship.

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 new 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 country's Constitution. In 1992 the Government reestablished diplomatic relations with the Holy See and lifted almost all restrictions on the Catholic Church. This later 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 Constitution provides that education should avoid privileges of religion, and that one religion or its members may not be given preference in education over another. Religious instruction is prohibited in public schools; however, religious associations are free to maintain private schools, which receive no public funds. Primary level home schooling for religious reasons is not prohibited explicitly nor 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 4,442 such notifications from June 2003 through May 31.

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 show that the Government granted permits for 972 buildings between June 1, 2003 and May 31. For 432 pending applications, the Government has requested additional information pertaining to the structure or to its proposed use. Religious groups report 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 5,526 between June 1, 2003 and April 30.

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 Soul's Day, Virgin of Guadalupe Day, and Christmas Eve.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In mid-2003 representatives of the political party Mexico Possible brought complaints against the bishops of Tlaxcala, Acapulco and Cuernavaca for violating article 130 of the Constitution and article 404 of the Penal Code. Both articles state that religious ministers cannot call for their followers to vote for or against a political party. While the bishops did not call for voting specifically against Mexico Possible, they did say that it was a sin to vote in favor of candidates who favor explicitly providing equal rights for homosexuals or to legalize abortion, both of which were positions that the (now-defunct) party endorsed. In August 2003, the Secretary of Government indicated that the bishops had not violated the Religious Associations and Public Worship Law.

According to the Religious Associations and Public Worship Law, religious groups may not own or administer broadcast radio or television stations; however, the Catholic Church owns and operates a national cable television channel. Government permission is required to transmit religious programming on commercial broadcast radio or television, and permission is granted routinely. Between June 2003 and May 31, authorities approved 11,116 transmissions.

Any religious building constructed after 1992 is the property of the religious association that built it. All religious buildings erected before that year are "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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While the Federal Government generally respects religious freedom in practice, poor enforcement mechanisms have allowed local authorities in Chiapas to discrimi-

nate 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 June 2003 and May 31, the Office of Religious Affairs in the Interior Ministry received 14 complaints of such harassment (see Section III). Religious differences often were a prominent feature of such incidents; however, ethnic differences, land disputes, and struggles over local political and economic power were frequently 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 at least two persons killed 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 people 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.

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 on June 22 because they 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. Government officials in Chiapas have taken no action, claiming that the families left of their own volition (see Section III).

According to the CNDH, from June 1991 to March 2003, it received 1,110 complaints of discrimination on religious grounds, especially from members of Jehovah's Witnesses, for their refusal to participate in national anthem and flag ceremonies in schools.

In February 2003, the CNDH called on the Governor of Michoacan to reinstate seven student members of Jehovah's Witnesses who were expelled from school in 2001 for such a refusal. As of May, the recommendation had been fulfilled partially.

In November 2003, the Federal Government published regulations under the 1992 Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship. Changes include opening prisons and health institutions to people who administer "spiritual help."

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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were cases of religious intolerance and expulsions from certain indigenous communities. This is particularly common in Chiapas, where many residents follow syncretistic (Catholic-Mayan) religious practices. 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 results 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.

In October 2003, heavily armed assailants stopped the automobile of Mariano Diaz Mendez, an evangelical Christian pastor, and killed him near the town of San Juan Chamula in Chiapas. He was the second evangelical Christian to be killed in the space of two weeks; Jairo Solis Lopez, another pastor, was killed earlier in the Chiapas municipality of Mapastepec. There was no information on investigations or arrests related to these killings.

In Chiapas traditionalist local leaders have denied approximately 150 children access to the local public schools in six 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 Guerrero 17 families of Jehovah's Witnesses, a total of 70 persons, were threatened by local authorities with eviction from their homes and the loss of inherited properties because they refused to contribute to Catholic religious festivals or to assume responsibilities that violated their conscience, such as becoming members of the local police. In November 2003, the two conflicting parties reached an agreement under which the Jehovah's Witnesses agreed to assume civic, community, and economic "obligations."

Several persons accused of being witches have been killed in Chiapas during the last decade.

In October 2003, the Director General for Clerical Affairs at the DAR estimated that nationwide there are at least 100 confrontations developing due to religious intolerance, primarily in the south. Government officials, the national human rights ombudsman, and interfaith groups are conducting 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.

The Jewish community in the country has not encountered violence, harassment, or vandalism. There are occasional protests due to the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, but the Government acts 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 March the head of CNDH criticized harassment of indigenous people who have converted to Islam, primarily in the area of San Cristobal in Chiapas; he attributed the harassment in part to reaction to increased Muslim proselytizing. CNDH initiated an investigation after receiving complaints that federal authorities discriminated against followers of Islam.

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 government officials, staff of nongovernmental organizations, and members of religious groups to discuss issues of religious freedom.

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 contributes 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 5.2 million. Over 90 percent of the population belongs to Christian denominations. According to the most recent census, conducted in 1995, 72.9 percent of the population were Roman Catholic, 15.1 percent were evangelical, 1.5 percent were members of the Moravian Church, and 0.1 percent were Episcopalian. Another 1.9 percent were associated with other religious groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Amish and Mennonite communities, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses. Some 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 January 2003 poll of 1,500 citizens that excluded the Atlantic Coast, where there is a greater prevalence of Protestant churches, 70.5 percent of respondents were Catholic, 16.1 percent were members of evangelical churches, 3.2 percent belonged to other denominations, and 9.8 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

Non-Christian communities are few and small. The Jewish community is 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 about 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 with about 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 of the country 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 often 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-Columbian 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, especially 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 Cerato, as of April, there were 860 churches and approximately 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 180 missionaries and 30,000 members in the country, the Mennonites have 8 missionary families and close to 4,000 members, mostly in the central Boaco region and rural areas in the north-Waslala. 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 meas-

ures 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.

Some churches and other nonprofit religious organizations, among them the Assemblies of God, reported bureaucratic delays in obtaining customs exemptions, although most reported that such delays had decreased significantly during the period covered by this report. 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 April 2003, the National Assembly approved a Tax Equity Law that attempted to streamline the exoneration process. Under the law, all groups must requalify for exoneration. This legislation remained largely untested during the period covered by this report.

In October 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, while stressing 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 religious holidays are recognized as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. The Festival of Santo Domingo is also celebrated on August 1 and 10; however, these are Managua holidays, not 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. 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. 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 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 2.9 million. According to a 1998 nationwide survey conducted by the Comptroller General's Office of Statistics and Census, 82 percent of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholic, 10 percent as evangelical, and 3 percent as unaffiliated with any religious group. Recent unofficial estimates indicate the evangelical population is closer to 15 to 20 percent, while Roman Catholic affiliation is declining. The remaining 5 percent of the population includes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), with an estimated 15,000 members, Seventh-day Adventists, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Episcopalians with between 5,000 and 9,000 members, and other Christians. It also includes small but influential Jewish and Muslim communities, each with about 10,000 members; Baha'is, who maintain one of the world's seven Baha'i Houses of Worship; and recent Chinese immigrants practicing Buddhism.

Members of the Catholic faith are found throughout the country and at all levels of society. Evangelical Christians also are dispersed geographically but tend to be from the lower socio-economic stratum. The mainstream Protestant denominations, which include Lutheran, Southern Baptist Convention, United Methodist, Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA), and Baptist congregations, derive their membership from the Antillean black and the expatriate communities, which are both concentrated in Panama and Colon Provinces. The Jewish community is largely concentrated 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 (176). Lutherans, the Southern Baptist Convention and Seventh-day Adventists each have a much smaller number of missionaries; many are from other Central 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.

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. Roman Catholicism's numerical predominance and the consideration given to it in the Constitution generally have not prejudiced other religions. However, Catholicism does enjoy certain state-sanctioned advantages over other faiths.

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.

Foreign missionaries are granted temporary 3-month religious 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. Foreign religious workers who intend to remain longer than 15 months must repeat the entire application process. Such additional extensions usually are granted. Catholic religious workers from outside the country benefit from a streamlined administrative process that grants them 5-year work permits.

The Constitution dictates that Catholicism be taught in public schools, although parents have the right to exempt their children from religious instruction.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Department of Immigration does not grant religious worker visas or work permits to members of the Unification Church. Officials based this decision on an alleged proliferation of deceptive religious worker visa applications, as well as certain Unification Church practices (such as mass marriages) that officials believed are contrary to the constitutional requirement that religious conduct respect Christian morality. The Unification Church has not appealed the decision.

The Constitution strictly limits the type of public offices that religious leaders may hold. The Constitution prohibits them from holding public office, except as related to social assistance, education, or scientific research.

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 Roman 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. Aggressive evangelical Protestant criticism of "new" religions, such as of Mormons or of Jehovah's Witnesses, is not widespread. The Jewish community has generally harmonious relationships with other faiths.

Mainstream denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Methodist churches, participate in a successful ecumenical movement directed by the nongovernmental Panamanian Ecumenical Committee. The committee sponsors

inter-religious conferences to discuss matters of faith and practice and plans joint liturgical celebrations and charitable projects. In conjunction with the University of Santa Maria la Antigua, the committee sponsors the Institute for Ecumenicism and Society, which conducts its own conferences and issues ecumenical publications. 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. The Ecumenical Committee is also part of a larger umbrella group of approximately three dozen business, political, religious, and civic groups forming the United Nations Development Program-sponsored Vision 2020 group. Vision 2020 seeks to develop consensus goals for addressing issues of pressing concern, such as democratic institutions, economic development, ethics, and environmental sustainability.

In August 2003, the Episcopal Church celebrated 150 years of Anglican presence in the country. The Church hosted a number of events throughout the year attended by government officials and religious leaders of all faiths.

Over the last decade, local religious leaders have become more outspoken in the ongoing debate on corruption. Religious leaders of all faiths urged the Government to continue efforts to ensure that the national elections, held in May, were fair and transparent. Evangelical leaders and adherents 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 both the evangelical and Muslim communities through activities such as inviting community leaders to Embassy events and attending religious meetings. Embassy officials also have met with religious leaders to discuss human rights and the promotion of democracy and civil society.

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 6,036,900 (2003 estimate). No figures are compiled or kept for membership in specific churches. An estimated 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. There are active Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical Christian, Jewish (both Orthodox 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 received substantial immigration from the Middle East, especially 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 Education and Culture; however, the criteria for recognition are minimal—they consist of completing required paperwork and payment of a small fee. The Government enforces few con-

trols 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, and several Catholic observances are public holidays. 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, The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15), The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8), and Christmas.

The country's armed forces have an extensive Roman Catholic chaplain program. The 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 the Church 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 Catholic Church is somewhat protective of its leading role in public life. The Bishop of Caacupé publicly accused President Nicanor Duarte Frutos, a nominal Catholic who attends Raices, a Mennonite church, of holding his advisers and cabinet ministers to a religious test after one adviser voluntarily joined the church as well. The Bishop also called the Raices (Roots) Church a "cult." There is, however, 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.

During the period covered by this report, a group of landless peasants attacked a compound in the Department of Concepcion owned by the Unification Church. The motive for the attack was primarily economic, as the peasants blamed increasing local unemployment on the Church's decrease in farming activity.

In 2002, a building in Asuncion was spray-painted with anti-Semitic graffiti. A police investigation did not yield results, and the investigation has been closed. This has been the only reported incident of anti-Semitic vandalism during the past 15 years.

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.

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 496,226 square miles, and its population is approximately 27,013,000. Nearly all major religions are represented in the country. The Cuanto Institute, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), estimates that 80 percent of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic, although the Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) estimates that only 15 percent of Roman Catholics attend church services on a weekly basis. Using the most recent census information (1993), the National Statistics Institute (INEI) estimates that Protestants, the majority of whom are evangelical or Pentecostal, constitute 7.2 percent of the population. This contrasts with the National Evangelical Council's (CONEP) estimate that evangelicals represent 12 percent of the population. The INEI estimate for evangelicals also includes non-evangelical groups such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. INEI estimates that adherents of non-Christian religions, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Shintoists, accounted for 2.5 percent of the population, while agnostics and atheists constitute 1.4 percent. INEI estimates that between 1972 and 1993, evangelical membership grew by 133 percent, Catholic membership decreased by 10 percent, and affiliation with other religions decreased by 60 percent. Evangelicals tend to reside in areas outside of Lima, the capitol, and in rural rather than urban areas. There is a small Jewish population in Lima and Cusco and a small Muslim population in Lima and Tacna.

Some Catholics combine indigenous worship with Catholic traditions. This type of syncretistic religion is practiced most often in the highlands.

Foreign missionary groups, including Mormons and several evangelical organizations, 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 Constitution establishes separation of Church and State; however, it 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; however, it maintains a close relationship with the Church, and a concordat signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. Officials of the Church often exert a high profile in the public sector; for example, Cardinal Cipriani, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, played a major role in the resignation of former Prime Minister Beatrice Merino. The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion; however, preferential treatment given to the Church in education, tax benefits, and other areas continued to raise concerns about potential infringement on the religious liberty of non-Catholics.

Congress is addressing the issue of Church-State relations in ongoing deliberations over revisions to the Constitution. The revised draft would continue to recognize the special role of the Roman Catholic Church in the country's historical, social, and cultural development, as expressed in Article 50 of the Constitution. However, the Congressional Committee on Constitutional Affairs also approved a draft amendment in 2003 which reads: "The State recognizes and respects all religious denominations and establishes agreements of cooperation with them, through its representative agents, with fairness to all." The language of the draft amendment would provide other religious groups with the opportunity to enter into agreements with the Government on a basis similar to that enjoyed by the Catholic Church.

All faiths are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. Religious denominations or churches are not required to register with the Government or apply for a license. There is a small Religious Affairs Unit within the Ministry of Justice whose primary purpose is to receive complaints of discrimination from religious groups. This unit also ensures that beyond the historic preferences (subsidies

and exemptions granted to the Catholic Church) all denominations and churches receive certain financial benefits, such as exemption from some import taxes and customs duties. The unit did not receive any discrimination complaints during the period covered by this report.

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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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. Two groups of Catholic clergy receive state remuneration in addition to the compensation paid to them by the Catholic Church. This applies to the country's 52 bishops as well as those priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the country's borders. Finally, each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government. According to 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.

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. Some non-Catholic parochial or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. The Education Ministry has made it mandatory for school authorities to appoint religious education teachers upon individual recommendations and approval by the presiding bishop of the local diocese.

Parents who do not wish their 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, 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 co-workers and relatives, to participate in their 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.

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 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 the National Evangelical Council of Peru (through its loosely affiliated, although independent, Peace and Hope Evan-

gelical 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 maintains regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including the CEAS, the Inter-religious Committee of Peru, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

ST. 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 two-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 adhere to Anglican beliefs, and 25 percent are 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.

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 now allowed to wear long hair in school.

The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for the registration of 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. 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.

While maintaining its secular nature, the Government requires all schools to conduct morning Christian prayers and hymns. Government meetings generally begin 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.

ST. 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 Church describes about 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 about 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 who also include 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 religious groups allows its officials to act in this capacity as well). Muslim leaders applied for official recognition during the reporting period; 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 are also 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.

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 exists 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 conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

In May 2003, the High Court sentenced two Rastafarian men to hang; at the end of the reporting period, 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 each Sunday at the church where the attack took place, and on all feast days to help the congregation feel more secure.

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.

ST. 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 people who claim a religious affiliation associate with the Anglican Church, although they may not be formal members of a congregation. The Anglican denomination has about 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 people 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.

Twenty to 30 Pentecostal denominations are present. The largest denomination, the Pentecostal Assembly of the West Indies, claims about 20 congregations. Overall, there are about 70 Pentecostal congregations. This group started to expand rapidly about 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 about 1,500 adherents and is growing, and there is 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.

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. Some tension also exists among different Christian denominations. For example, some Evangelicals allegedly criticize 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 coworkers 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 460,000. An estimated 37 percent of the population traces its ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, another 31 percent is of African descent, 15 percent claim Indonesian ancestry, and smaller percentages of the population are of Chinese, Amerindian, Portuguese, Lebanese, and Dutch extraction.

According to government statistics, 40 percent of the population is Christian, including Roman Catholic 18 percent, Moravian 15 percent, and other Protestant—among them Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, Evangelical, Baptist, and Methodist—7 percent. Twenty-seven percent of the population is Hindu, 22 percent identify themselves as Muslim, 8 percent follow indigenous religions, and 3 percent claim no faith.

Several Christian denominations, including Canadian and U.S.-based church groups, have established missionary programs throughout the country. There are an estimated 18 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 international groups such as the World Islamic Call Society, a nongovernmental organization that gives training and financial support to Islamic groups.

Many political parties have strong ethnic ties and tend to be dominated by one faith. Three out of the four governing coalition parties are ethnic based. The mostly Creole National Party of Suriname is dominated by the Moravian faith, the mostly ethnic Indian United Reformed Party is dominated by the Hindu faith, and the mostly ethnic Javanese Pertjaja Luhur Party is dominated by the Muslim faith. However, parties have no requirement that political party leaders or members adhere to a particular 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 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 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 officially recognized religious holy days that are celebrated: Holi Phagwa (Hindu), Good Friday (Christian), Easter Monday (Christian), Id ul Fitr (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, 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.

Adherence to a particular faith does not confer advantage in civil, political, economic, military, or other secular status.

The military maintains a chaplaincy that provides interfaith services for Hindu, Muslim, and Catholic members. Military personnel are welcome to attend other 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 at the schools are civil servants and the schools are public, religious groups provide all funding with the exception of teachers' salaries and a small maintenance stipend. While religious instruction in public schools is permitted, 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, which offer religious instruction. 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, especially those living in the capital of Paramaribo, celebrate to varying degrees the religious holidays of other groups.

In 2002 police informed Jewish community leaders that they had received a threat to set fire to the country's main (and only active) synagogue. Synagogue leaders increased security. No suspects had been identified by the end of the period covered by this report.

There is an Inter-Religious Council (IRIS) 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 dialogue with leaders of the country's religious communities. In 2003 the Embassy sponsored a Fulbright Senior Specialist who conducted a course at Anton De Kom

University, in which human rights principles, including religious freedom, were taught to students and policymakers.

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 of African and 40 percent of East Indian extraction; the remainder are mostly of European, Syrian, Lebanese, and Chinese descent. According to the latest official statistics (2000), 26 percent of the population are practicing or nominal Roman Catholic, 24.6 percent are 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 are Hindu, and 5.8 percent are 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 members of Jehovah's Witnesses (1.6 percent), atheists (1.9 percent), "other," which includes numerous small Christian groups as well as Bahai's, Rastafarians, Buddhists, Jews, etc. (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 (PNM) 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 United National Congress (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 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. 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 religious and public 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 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. For example, in the 1995 case of Sumayyah Mohammed vs. Moraine and Another, a Muslim student who had been prohibited from modifying her school uniform to conform to religious requirements was granted redress on constitutional grounds.

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-ul-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. People 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. 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 operate relatively freely; however, the Government limits the number of foreign missionaries allowed to be in the country to 35 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 are not denied the opportunity to serve in the military because of religious beliefs. The military service is predominantly Afro-Trinidadian and Christian, and the military maintains a part-time chaplain to provide Christian religious services. Military personnel also have access to other religious services in their local communities.

The Government is known to closely monitor three religiously affiliated groups. One is a radical Muslim organization called the Jamaat al Muslimeen, whose members attempted a coup in 1990. In 2001 a court ordered the Jamaat to pay the Government $2.5 million (TTD 15.3 million) for damage done to public buildings during the 1990 coup attempt. During the same year, the court ruled on a counter-suit and awarded the Jamaat approximately $350,000 (TTD 2.1 million) for destruction of its facilities during the same attempted coup. The Government also monitors the Jamaat al Murabiteen because of its affiliation with former Jamaat al Muslimeen lieutenant Maulana Hasan Anyabwile. The Waajihatul Islaamiyyah is 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, therefore religious tolerance is instilled very early in life. Members of different religious faiths often grow up together 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 who enjoy the public holiday. 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 are made about the efforts of some groups to proselytize in neighborhoods where another religion is dominant. The most frequent public complaints have been lodged by Hindu religious leaders against evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Such objections may reflect racial tensions that at times arise 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. In the interest of promoting 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 2003 survey by Interconsult published in the daily newspaper Ultimas Noticias reported that 58 percent of those surveyed designated themselves as Roman Catholics, 5 percent as Evangelical Protestants, 2 percent as Protestants, 19 percent as believers without a religious affiliation, and 14 percent as non-believers. 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 65,000 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 365 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 religious status. The group must reapply every five 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 religious 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. The revised code passed the lower house in December 2003 and is pending in the Senate.

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 Catholic Church. There are several nongovernmental organizations that promote interfaith understanding.

In April there were reports that anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi statements were painted in and around Jewish cemeteries. The graffiti quickly were painted over by the authorities, but no arrests were made. Early in 2002, a limited outbreak of anti-Semitic graffiti and propaganda received media attention. Several citizens, including a former minister, were defamed in the graffiti, and there were reports of harassment by telephone. This resulted in swift action by police, who arrested a small cell of three juvenile "skinheads" and confiscated weapons that included a .22 caliber pistol. The adolescents were indicted and were still awaiting trial 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.

During the period covered by this report, embassy staff met with human rights and religious nongovernmental organizations 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 Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Islamic community, and Mormon and Protestant churches.

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 the current political crisis, 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 9 percent of the population, or less than 2 million persons. There are small but influential Muslim and Jewish communities. The capital, Caracas, has a large mosque, and the country's Jewish community is very active. According to the Government, Protestant churches are the most rapidly growing religious groups in the country.

There are an estimated 4,000 foreign missionaries. They require special visas to enter the country. 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.

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 maintains a registry of religious groups, disburses funds to the Roman Catholic Church, and promotes 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; however, some groups have complained that the process is slow and inefficient. No religious group has been refused registration by the DJR.

In 1964 the Government and the Holy See signed a concordat that underscores the country's historical ties to the Roman Catholic Church and provides the basis for government subsidies to the Church. Government officials stress that 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, and the budget is limited to $350,000 (700 million bolivars). Seven Protestant groups are scheduled to receive a total of $10,500 (21 million bolivars) to be disbursed mid-year, and for the first time, the syncretic Maria Lionza movement, a popular cult blending African, indigenous, and Christian beliefs, will receive $5,000 (10 million bolivars) in funding.

The Catholic Church has been a vocal participant in the national political debate.

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 to interfere with the rights of others. However, there were some efforts by Govern-

ment, motivated by the current political crisis, to limit the influence of Catholic churches in certain social and political areas.

The Government annually provides about $600,000 (1.2 billion bolivars) in subsidies to Catholic schools and social programs that help the poor. Other religious groups are free to establish and run 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 nor 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

Catholic bishops and government officials, including President Chavez, engaged in several disputes that mirrored the general political conflict. During the period covered by this report, several senior government officials launched personal attacks against Catholic Church leaders and made numerous public statements intended to intimidate and threaten the church. In April President Chavez denounced the country's Catholic Church leadership as "immoral liars" who were "equal to Judas." In December 2003, there were acts of vandalism against religious statues in Caracas and Falcon state, and a church was attacked twice in a town outside Caracas. In September 2003, police raided a church in Barquisimeto, allegedly looking for explosives. Church leaders called these acts attempts to threaten the Church for its political stance against the Government, while government leaders accused the Church of staging the incidents. These cases were still under investigation at the end of the period covered by this report.

In May the Archbishop of Merida accused the Government of seeking to destroy the Catholic Church's credibility by manufacturing scandals aimed at priests and bishops. He described a series of attacks on churches, cathedrals, and priests' houses, whose apparent goal was to create fear rather than steal objects of value. Prior to at least one attack, police presence had been withdrawn after authorities allegedly claimed it was a privilege the Catholic Church should not enjoy. The Archbishop believes the Government wishes to diminish the Church or any institution perceived as a competitor. There have been no official investigations into these allegations.

In a June 2003 speech to the Organization of American States General Assembly, Foreign Minister Roy Chaderton sought to historically link Christianity with ethnic persecution, slavery, and mass murder.

During the period covered by this report, statements from senior government officials supporting Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Islamic extremist movements raised tensions and intimidated the country's Jewish community. In April the office of Vice President Rangel released a press statement referring to the owners of a business involved in a labor dispute as being "of Jewish nationality," although they were citizens of the country. Also in April, a U.S. Embassy officer found a violently anti-Semitic and anti-American leaflet in an Interior and Justice Ministry office waiting room. The source of the pamphlet was not determined, but it was believed to have been downloaded from an Internet Web page and apparently printed by pro-Chavez 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. However, in February 2003, the Israeli Association of Venezuela photographed graffiti on a Caracas synagogue that labeled the members of the Jewish community as fascists and murderers of the Palestinian and Iraqi peoples. The Gov-

ernment did not investigate the incident. In January the U.S. Embassy received an e-mail threatening North Americans and Jews in the country.

On May 27, 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.

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 and meets periodically with the DJR. The Ambassador meets regularly with religious authorities, and the Embassy facilitates communication between U.S. religious groups and the Government.

APPENDIXES

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. [1]

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 an 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,

[1] Hundred and eighty-third plenary meeting; Resolution 217(A)(III) of the United Nations General Assembly,December 10, 1948.

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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.

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 pro-

mote 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 I 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 dis-

crimination 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 I 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 matter 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 tie 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 I 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 RELIEF OR BELIEF

The General Assembly, [1]

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 non-discrimination 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;

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[1] Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 36/55 of 25 November 1981.

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. 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, we provide key background materials on religious freedom to all students via a CD Rom we distribute to each officer. We also direct them to key websites of 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.

Each student is provided with the Annual Report on Religious Freedom and the report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom listed in Section III. In addition the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor provides at least a half-day session during which religious freedom issues are featured prominently. There also usually is a segment that includes a discussion of religious persecution, religious identity, and religious reconciliation as important factors in contemporary international conflicts.

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.

Students are provided with a course notebook that contains materials addressing religious freedom issues. 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 weeklong 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 serves as the prerequisite for obtaining a consular commission 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 in order that they may serve temporary duty as consular officers should the need arise.

The PC–530 schedule includes a lecture related to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), "Working with INS," 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, which includes a chapter on "Refugees, Asylum, Walk-ins, and Parole." This chapter describes the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refugee criteria, the U.S. refugee program, and processing requirements for refugees. Scenarios involving religious minorities have been incorporated into the "role play" portion of the training on consular prison visits.

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 World Wide Web guidance) that direct them to even more detailed material.

AMBASSADORIAL AND DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION TRAINING

The Ambassadorial Seminar hands out a photocopied and bound publication put together by the Office of International Religious Freedom. The Under Secretary for Global Affairs regularly is scheduled to speak to the Ambassadorial Seminar.

III. Background Material on Religious Freedom

The following background materials related to religious freedom are made available to FSI students:

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

- Mission Statement for the State Department Office of International Religious Freedom
- "Preparing the Annual report on Religious Freedom for 2002"
- 2002 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom (Executive Summary)
- Main Web Page of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

- List of Members (current and former) 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. "Preparing the Annual Report on Religious Freedom for 2001" State Department Telegram: April 13, 2001 (MRN 66404), http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf

2. 2002 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom (Executive Summary), http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/13608.html

3. Main Web Page of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, http://www.uscirf.gov

4. List of Members (current & former) for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, http://www.uscirf.gov/cirfPages/faqs.php3?mode=print

5. Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, May 2003, http://www.uscirf.gov/reports/02May03/Final Report.php3

6. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html

7. 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 FY2003, 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 in order 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 training 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 as a part of the regular curriculum information about IRFA. In addition, a continual effort is made to include further discussion of religious persecution whenever possible in both the five-week training and in local asylum office training. In addition to local asylum office trainings, the primary lesson plan has been updated to reflect newly issued documents by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees on religious persecution as well as recent developments in caselaw.

USCIS also provides the Refugee Application Adjudication Course (RAAC). This training course is mandated by IRFA and consists of two-weeks of intensive instruction in refugee law and overseas refugee procedures. It is provided to USCIS officers who are responsible for adjudicating refugee applications. 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. Nine sessions were conducted in FY2003.

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-

[1] Asylum 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, the CIS 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 nearly 10 million. 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.

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 is Sudan, where the long ongoing civil war has a religious dimension. Islam is the state religion and Muslims dominate the Government. The Government continues to restrict the activities of Christians, practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, and other non-Muslims. Security forces reportedly harass and use violence against persons based on their religious beliefs. 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 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 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. The refugee-processing program in Cairo was expanded in 1999 with Sudanese refugees as the primary beneficiaries. During FY 2001, 2,140 Sudanese refugees were resettled in the United States. Religious freedom is also a growing concern in Nigeria, where northern states have adopted and expanded Islamic law

(Shari'a). Many non-Muslims have left the northern states and returned to the south because they fear the application of Shari'a. These internally displaced persons face harassment and loss of opportunities if they remain in the north.

EAST ASIA

While many governments in East Asia permit freedom of worship, religious believers face serious persecution in some countries. North Korea allows no religious freedom, and all organized religious activity except that which serves the interests of the state is suppressed.

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 oranizations that do not submit to state control. Most independent religious activities are either prohibited or severely restricted. Despite dramatic increases in religious observance in China, the government continues to suppress 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. There are many cases of arrest, imprisonment, and torture of religious believers in China. In Vietnam, independent Buddhists and Catholics face restrictions on their freedom of worship. Many Vietnamese Protestants, especially ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands and Northwest provinces, continue to suffer arrest, imprisonment, closing of their churches, and efforts to force renunciations of their faith. The situation for some religious groups in Laos is similar to that in Vietnam; Protestants in particular suffer periodic arrest and imprisonment. In Burma, the government represses most non-Buddhist religions, though there are recent indications that the regime is taking steps to be more tolerant of other religions.

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. We have worked closely with UNHCR to strengthen this referral process.

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 states regulate religious groups and activities, specifing a set of "traditional" religions with certain privileges denied to other groups. 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 the Central Asian republics where, in the case of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Muslims groups not approved by the State are seen as potential terrorists and suffer harassment or imprisonment. 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 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 discriminatory legislation has encouraged an atmosphere of violence, which has led to acts by extremists against religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Zikris. Pakistan's support of America's War on Terror has exacerbated existing anti-Western feelings in elements of Pakistani society and led to fatal attacks against local and international Christian targets. In India responses by state and local authorities to extremist violence were often inadequate. In Saudi Arabia public non-Muslim worship is a criminal offense, 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 recently 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). That legislation requires the Secretary of Homeland Security, after consultation with the Secretary of State, to identify categories of Iranian religious minorities whose refugee claims will be adjudicated in accordance with a reduced evidentiary burden. The category designation is now under consideration at DHS. The Department of State will continue efforts to improve access to refugee processing through dialog 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.

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