110th Congress
2nd Session

JOINT COMMITTEE PRINT

ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2007

REPORT

SUBMITTED TO THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AND THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
U.S. SENATE

BY THE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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

Available via the World Wide Web:
http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/

FEBRUARY 2008

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

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2250 Mail: Stop SSOP, Washington, DC 20402–0001

ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2007

110th Congress
2nd Session

JOINT COMMITTEE PRINT

ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2007

REPORT

SUBMITTED TO THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AND THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
U.S. SENATE

BY THE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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

Available via the World Wide Web:
http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/

FEBRUARY 2008

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

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

37–767PDF WASHINGTON : 2008

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

HOWARD L. BERMAN, California, *Acting Chairman*

GARY L. ACKERMAN, New York
ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA, American Samoa
DONALD M. PAYNE, New Jersey
BRAD SHERMAN, California
ROBERT WEXLER, Florida
ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York
BILL DELAHUNT, Massachusetts
GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
DIANE E. WATSON, California
ADAM SMITH, Washington
RUSS CARNAHAN, Missouri
JOHN S. TANNER, Tennessee
GENE GREEN, Texas
LYNN C. WOOLSEY, California
SHEILA JACKSON LEE, Texas
RUBÉN HINOJOSA, Texas
JOSEPH CROWLEY, New York
DAVID WU, Oregon
BRAD MILLER, North Carolina
LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ, California
DAVID SCOTT, Georgia
JIM COSTA, California
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
GABRIELLE GIFFORDS, Arizona
RON KLEIN, Florida
VACANT

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, Florida
CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
DAN BURTON, Indiana
ELTON GALLEGLY, California
DANA ROHRABACHER, California
DONALD A. MANZULLO, Illinois
EDWARD R. ROYCE, California
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
THOMAS G. TANCREDO, Colorado
RON PAUL, Texas
JEFF FLAKE, Arizona
MIKE PENCE, Indiana
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
JOHN BOOZMAN, Arkansas
J. GRESHAM BARRETT, South Carolina
CONNIE MACK, Florida
JEFF FORTENBERRY, Nebraska
MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, Texas
TED POE, Texas
BOB INGLIS, South Carolina
LUIS G. FORTUÑO, Puerto Rico
GUS BILIRAKIS, Florida
ROBERT J. WITTMAN, Virginia

ROBERT R. KING, *Staff Director*
YLEEM POBLETE, *Republican Staff Director*

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR., DELAWARE, *Chairman*

CHRISTOPHER J. DODD, Connecticut
JOHN F. KERRY, Massachusetts
RUSSELL D. FEINGOLD, Wisconsin
BARBARA BOXER, California
BILL NELSON, Florida
BARACK OBAMA, Illinois
ROBERT MENENDEZ, New Jersey
BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, Maryland
ROBERT P. CASEY, JR., Pennsylvania
JIM WEBB, Virginia

RICHARD G. LUGAR, Indiana
CHUCK HAGEL, Nebraska
NORM COLEMAN, Minnesota
BOB CORKER, Tennessee
GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, Ohio
LISA MURKOWSKI, Alaska
JIM DEMINT, South Carolina
JOHNNY ISAKSON, Georgia
DAVID VITTER, Louisiana
JOHN BARRASSO, Wyoming

ANTONY J. BLINKEN, *Staff Director*
KENNETH A. MYERS, JR., *Republican Staff Director*

CONTENTS

	Page
LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL	vii
PREFACE	ix
INTRODUCTION	xi
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	xiii

REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM 2007

COUNTRY INDEX

AFRICA:	
Angola	1
Benin	3
Botswana	4
Burkina Faso	6
Burundi	8
Cameroon	9
Cape Verde	11
Central African Republic	13
Chad	15
Comoros, Union of the	18
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	20
Congo, Republic of the	22
Cote d'Ivoire	24
Djibouti	29
Equatorial Guinea	30
Eritrea	32
Ethiopia	38
Gabon	42
Gambia, The	43
Ghana	45
Guinea	49
Guinea-Bissau	52
Kenya	53
Lesotho	56
Liberia	58
Madagascar	60
Malawi	61
Mali	63
Mauritania	64
Mauritius	67
Mozambique	69
Namibia	71
Niger	72
Nigeria	74
Rwanda	79
Sao Tome and Principe	82
Senegal	83
Seychelles	85
Sierra Leone	86
Somalia	87
South Africa	89
Sudan	92
Swaziland	97

Page

AFRICA—CONTINUED
Tanzania 99
Togo 103
Uganda 105
Zambia 107
Zimbabwe 109

EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC:
Australia 113
Brunei 115
Burma 119
Cambodia 128
China (Taiwan only) 130
China 133
Hong Kong 146
Macau 150
Tibet 152
East Timor 159
Fiji 161
Indonesia 163
Japan 175
Kiribati 176
Korea, Democratic People's Republic of 177
Korea, Republic of 183
Laos 185
Malaysia 194
Marshall Islands 200
Micronesia, Federated States of 201
Mongolia 202
Nauru 204
New Zealand 206
Palau 208
Papua New Guinea 209
Philippines 211
Samoa 214
Singapore 216
Solomon Islands 218
Thailand 220
Tonga 225
Tuvalu 226
Vanuatu 227
Vietnam 229

EUROPE AND EURASIA:
Albania 245
Andorra 248
Armenia 249
Austria 253
Azerbaijan 258
Belarus 263
Belgium 274
Bosnia and Herzegovina 280
Bulgaria 288
Croatia 293
Cyprus 297
Czech Republic 302
Denmark 307
Estonia 311
Finland 313
France 316
Georgia 328
Germany 333
Greece 340
Hungary 348
Iceland 353
Ireland 357
Italy 360
Latvia 363

Page

EUROPE AND EURASIA—CONTINUED
Liechtenstein 367
Lithuania 370
Luxembourg 376
Macedonia 378
Malta 381
Moldova 383
Monaco 388
Montenegro 389
Netherlands, The 390
Norway 394
Poland 397
Portugal 402
Romania 405
Russia 418
San Marino 436
Serbia (includes Kosovo) 437
Kosovo 440
Slovak Republic 445
Slovenia 451
Spain 454
Sweden 460
Switzerland 465
Turkey 469
Ukraine 479
United Kingdom 487

NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA:
Algeria 497
Bahrain 502
Egypt 506
Iran 521
Iraq 530
Israel 539
Occupied Territories, The 550
Jordan 557
Kuwait 563
Lebanon 570
Libya 574
Morocco and Western Sahara 577
Western Sahara 580
Oman 581
Qatar 583
Saudi Arabia 586
Syria 598
Tunisia 603
United Arab Emirates 607
Yemen 612

SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA:
Afghanistan 617
Bangladesh 626
Bhutan 633
India 636
Kazakhstan 651
Kyrgyz Republic 658
Maldives 664
Nepal 667
Pakistan 671
Sri Lanka 683
Tajikistan 690
Turkmenistan 697
Uzbekistan 704

WESTERN HEMISPHERE:
Antigua and Barbuda 719
Argentina 720
Bahamas 723

Page

WESTERN HEMISPHERE—CONTINUED
Barbados 724
Belize 726
Bolivia 727
Brazil 729
Canada 732
Chile 735
Colombia 737
Costa Rica 741
Cuba 744
Dominica 749
Dominican Republic 750
Ecuador 752
El Salvador 753
Grenada 755
Guatemala 756
Guyana 758
Haiti 759
Honduras 761
Jamaica 763
Mexico 764
Nicaragua 769
Panama 772
Paraguay 774
Peru 775
Saint Kitts and Nevis 778
Saint Lucia 779
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 780
Suriname 781
Trinidad and Tobago 783
Uruguay 785
Venezuela 787

APPENDICES:
A. Universal Declaration of Human Rights 793
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 797
C. Training at the Foreign Service Institute Related to the International Religious Freedom Act 811
D. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) 815
E. Overview of U.S. Refugee Policy 817

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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

Hon. TOM LANTOS, *Chairman,*
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On behalf of Secretary Rice, we are pleased to transmit the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom 2007*. This report is submitted in compliance with Sec. 102 of P.L. 105–292, the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which calls for a report to describe and assess the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom in each country, to describe U.S. actions and policies in support of religious freedom, and to provide specified information on a variety of topics related to religious freedom.

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

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

Sincerely,

JEFFREY T. BERGINER,
Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs.

PREFACE

2007 REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Why the Reports are Prepared

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

How the Reports are Prepared

U.S. Embassies prepare the initial drafts of these reports, gathering information 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.

The Office of International Religious Freedom collaborated in collecting and analyzing information for the country reports, drawing on the expertise of other Department of State offices, religious organizations, other non-governmental organizations, foreign Government officials, representatives from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations and institutions, and experts from academia and the media. In compiling and editing the country reports, the Office of International Religious Freedom consulted with experts on issues of religious discrimination and persecution, religious leaders from a wide variety of faiths, and experts on legal matters. The office's guiding principle was to ensure that all relevant information was assessed as objectively, thoroughly, and fairly as possible.

The report will be used by a wide range of U.S. Government departments, agencies, and offices to shape policy; conduct diplomacy; inform assistance, training, and other resource allocations; and help determine which countries have engaged in or tolerated "particularly severe violations" of religious freedom, otherwise known as Countries of Particular Concern.

A Word on Usage

When this report states that a Government "generally respected" the right of religious freedom over the reporting period, this phrase signifies that the Government attempted to protect religious freedom in the fullest sense. "Generally respected" is thus the highest level of respect for religious freedom assigned by this report. The phrase "generally respected" is used because the protection and promotion of religious freedom is a dynamic endeavor; it cannot be stated categorically that any Government fully respected this right over the reporting year, even in the best of circumstances.

Acknowledgements

The 2007 report covers the period from July 1, 2006, to June 30, 2007, and reflects a year of dedicated effort by hundreds of Foreign Service and Civil Service Officers in the Department of State and U.S. missions abroad. 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. In addition to their efforts, we acknowledge the diligent labor and tireless commitment to religious freedom of those within the Office of International Religious

Freedom whose work made this report possible: Clarissa Adamson, Julia Becker, Judson Birdsall, Mary Anne Borst, Sandra Bunn-Livingstone, Cierra Burnett, Barbara Cates, Warren Cofsky, A. Jack Croddy, Doug Dearborn, Lauren Diekman, Augustine Fahey, Carrie Flinchbaugh, Maureen Gaffney, Albert Gombis, Noel Hartley, Caitlin Helfrich, Nancy Hewett, Olivia Hilton, Victor Huser, Emilie Kao, Justin Kern, Stephen Liston, Kathryn Lurie, Gwendolyn Mack, Courtney Magill, Safia Mohamoud, Joannella Morales, Aaron Pina, Danielle Polebaum, David Rodearmel, Deborah Schneider, Suzanne Sittichai, Rebecca Struwe, H. Knox Thames, and Gilberto Torresvela. The work of all of these individuals advances the cause of freedom, ensures accuracy in our reporting, and brings hope to repressed people around the world.

INTRODUCTION

"The freedom to worship is so central to America's character that we tend to take it personally when that freedom is denied to others. Our country was a leading voice on behalf of the Jewish refusniks in the Soviet Union. Americans joined in common cause with Catholics and Protestants who prayed in secret behind the Iron Curtain. America has stood with Muslims seeking to freely practice their beliefs in places such as Burma and China."

President George W. Bush, June 27, 2007

Our founding fathers established religious liberty as the cornerstone of America's constitutional system by enshrining it in the First Amendment of our Bill of Rights. Many of our Nation's early settlers fled religious persecution to come to America; hence they vividly understood the importance of religious freedom.

Hanging over one of the main entrances to the U.S. Department of State is a mural that vividly captures this commitment. The 50-by-12 foot painting by Kindred McLeary represents the freedoms of worship, speech, assembly, and the press (a portion of the mural is highlighted on the cover of this year's Report materials). The mural was completed in 1942 at the height of one of the most challenging periods in the history of our country. The mural serves today as a potent reminder that, even at times of great national challenge and threat, the heart of our foreign policy encompasses the protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms, starting with freedom of worship.

The United States is not alone in this commitment to religious freedom. The international community has repeatedly declared that freedom of religion is a fundamental human right. Such declarations can be found in Article 18 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16 of the Vienna Concluding Document of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Article 12 of the American Declaration of Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and Article 9 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the Council of Europe.

The U.N. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is particularly noteworthy, as it made binding the aspirational rights highlighted in the Universal Declaration. Article 18 declares, "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." Article 18 of the Covenant goes on to state that "No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice."

Unfortunately, as individuals and communities struggle for religious freedom many Governments ignore their international obligations. In too many countries, Governments refuse to recognize and protect religious freedom, and millions suffer as a result. In some cases, religious believers are imprisoned or physically abused, simply for the courage of their convictions. In others, they are denied the freedom to choose their faith or talk about it openly. One contemporary example of a threat to this freedom is a trend of new laws that, ironically, in the name of tolerance, bars discussion of varied religious viewpoints within a religion or between varying belief systems.

In response to these and other threats to free religious practice, the U.S. Congress in 1998 passed the International Religious Freedom Act. The Act reaffirmed that it is the policy of the United States to "condemn violations of religious freedom, and to promote, and to assist other Governments in the promotion of, the fundamental right to freedom of religion." Most importantly, the Act declares the United States will stand for liberty and stand with the persecuted.

The Act established the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF Office) in the U.S. Department of State and mandated the publication of the *Annual Report*

on International Religious Freedom. This Report covers the entire world and is the most comprehensive catalogue of both religious freedom abuses and of improvements with respect to this fundamental right. The final product represents countless hours of investigation, documentation, and analysis by U.S. embassies and consulates abroad and by IRF Office staff in Washington. Because of this meticulous work and its broad coverage, the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* is read by both the powerful and the powerless, by the victims of religious persecution and by those with the ability to remedy such abuse.

The International Religious Freedom Act also mandated the creation of an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, who acts as principal adviser to both the President and the Secretary of State on advancing religious freedom worldwide. The Ambassador's role, supported by the IRF Office and in concert with other U.S. officials, is to provide a voice for the voiceless and the oppressed. I and my staff engage Governments, be they ally or adversary, to raise concerns across the full range of religious freedom violations. We also work within our Government to help ensure U.S. foreign policy reflects our country's historic commitment to religious freedom.

Thankfully, our Nation and the Department of State are led by individuals with a deep commitment to this issue. Both President Bush and Secretary of State Rice have done much to promote religious freedom around the world. The Congress has also been a steadfast ally in highlighting abuses and encouraging improvements in many nations. Non-governmental organizations and religious groups are also valued partners in our work. This ninth edition of the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* is a testament to the commitment of our leaders and citizens to this issue.

The *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* is a natural outgrowth of our country's history and a current reflection of our values. As Secretary of State Rice has said, "We are mindful that too many people of faith can only whisper to God in the silent sanctuaries of their conscience, because they fear persecution for their religious beliefs." She concludes, "Government simply has no right to stand between the individual and the Almighty."

Great strides have been made to protect religious freedoms, both in the United States and around the world. Sadly, however, too many individuals are unable to exercise their religious liberties and suffer, sometimes under great duress and violence, for their faith. It is this knowledge that drives our work on this Annual Report and that inspires our dedication to work towards the day when all persons enjoy this cherished human right.

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Report

The purpose of this report on religious freedom is to document the actions of Governments—those that repress religious expression, persecute innocent believers, or tolerate violence against religious minorities, as well as those that respect, protect, and promote religious freedom. We strive to report with fairness and accuracy on abuses against adherents of all religious traditions and beliefs. The Governments we report on range from those that provided a high level of protection for religious freedom in the broadest sense (those that "generally respected" religious freedom) to totalitarian regimes that sought to control religious thought and expression and regarded some or all religious groups as threats.

The promotion of religious freedom is a core objective of U.S. foreign policy and is part of the U.S. Department of State's mission. The commitment of the United States to religious freedom and to international human rights standards is also articulated in such documents as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which clearly states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. As an expression of our deep national commitment to these freedoms, the Department of State monitors religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, recommends and implements policies directed toward regions and countries, and develops programs to promote religious freedom. Through transformational diplomacy, the United States seeks to promote freedom of religion and conscience throughout the world as a fundamental human right and as a source of stability for all countries. In so doing, it strives to assist newly formed democracies in implementing freedom of religion and conscience, assist religious and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting religious freedom, and identify and promote changes in the policies of regimes that severely persecute their citizens or others on the basis of religious belief.

The vast majority of the world's people have religious beliefs, which they hold dear. It is because religion is generally viewed by people as having such a central place in their lives that many regard religious freedom as the most important of rights. At the same time, global trends, regional distinctions, local preferences, and personal histories often lead to significant overlap between religious identity and ethnicity, class, language group, or political affiliation.

The right to religious freedom can be abused in many ways both blatant and subtle. It can be helpful to recognize that abuses of, or restrictions on, religious freedom can take many forms, as suggested by the five categories discussed below. In totalitarian/authoritarian regimes, and states which exhibit marked hostility toward minority religions, a wide range of abuses and repression takes place at the hands of state agents. In other states, where there are appropriate legal provisions for religious freedom, we nevertheless may see state agents neglecting to uphold these legal provisions by investigating and prosecuting instances of societal discrimination. In yet other cases, states may have certain discriminatory legislation that favors majority religions, or may pass legislation or enact policies that discriminate against a small number of religious groups that the state identifies as cults.

The first and most stark category of abuses is seen in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, which seek to control religious thought and expression. Such regimes regard some or all religious groups as enemies of the state because of their religious beliefs or their independence from central authority. Some Governments are hostile towards particular groups, often identifying them as "security threats." It is important to distinguish between groups of religious believers who express legitimate political grievances and those that misuse religion to advocate violence against other religious groups or the state. This report categorizes as an abuse a Government's broad repression of religious expression among a peacefully practicing population on the grounds of security concerns. For example, the war on terror is used by some Governments as an excuse to repress peaceful religious practice. The report also notes those countries and situations in which authorities' over-zealous

actions taken against observant believers suspected of extremism have had the principal effect of restricting religious freedom. In some countries, for example, many refrain from attending mosque frequently for fear that their Government will characterize them as religious extremists.

A second category of abuses occurs with state hostility toward minority or nonapproved religions. These Governments implement policies designed to demand that adherents recant their faith, to cause religious group members to flee the country, or to intimidate and harass certain religious groups. This report notes, for example, when state repression of religious groups was linked to ethnic identity, because a Government dominated by a majority ethnic group suppressed the faith of a minority group. Also detailed in this report are instances where Governments used an individual's religious devotion as a proxy for determining his or her political ideology, which resulted in the intimidation and harassment of certain religious groups.

Yet a third kind of abuse stems from a state's failure to address either societal discrimination or societal abuses against religious groups. In these countries, legislation may discourage religious discrimination and persecution, but officials fail to prevent attacks, harassment, or other harmful acts against minority religious groups. Protecting religious freedom is not just a matter of having in place laws and policies which in written form seem to uphold religious freedom. It requires active work by a government at all levels to prevent abuses by governmental or private actors, to bring abusers to justice, and to provide redress to victims, when appropriate. Governments have the responsibility to ensure that their agents do not commit abuses of religious freedom and to protect religious freedom by rule of law in a way that ensures that private actors do not repress the rights of others. In addition, it is critical that Governments foster an environment of respect and tolerance for all people. This report documents cases in which Governments have failed to prevent violations of religious freedom, or have not responded with consistency and vigor to violations of religious freedom by private actors, nongovernmental entities, or local law enforcement officials.

A fourth category encompasses abuses that occur when Governments have enacted discriminatory legislation or implemented policies that favor majority religions and disadvantage minority religions. These circumstances often result from historical dominance by the majority religion and a bias against new or minority religions. Although the majority of the population in a country may worship without harassment, such a situation cannot be characterized as true freedom to choose one's faith and worship freely. Furthermore, Government backing of a religion can result in restrictions even on worshippers in the majority faith, when the state favors only one interpretation of that religion.

Finally, the practice of discriminating against certain religions by identifying them as dangerous cults or sects is a common type of restriction on religious freedom, even in countries where religious freedom is otherwise respected. For example, this report discusses denunciations against Shi'ite Muslims in Sunni-majority countries, and vice versa, especially where Governments have taken it upon themselves to regulate religious belief and practice according to one of these faith traditions.

The remainder of this Executive Summary consists of two parts. Part I summarizes, on a country-by-country basis, actions the U.S. Government has taken to advance international religious freedom in the nations designated "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPCs) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Part II provides a summary of conditions in a number of countries where religious freedom is of significant interest, including in Countries of Particular Concern. For each country, this section notes the legal situation and relevant policies, and gives examples of particular Government abuses or positive steps Governments have taken to promote or protect religious freedom. In most cases, these countries exhibit one or more of the forms of abuses outlined above.

PART I: U.S. ACTIONS IN COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRF Act) requires an annual review of the status of religious freedom worldwide and the designation of countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" during the reporting period as "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPCs). Following the designation, a period of negotiation may ensue, in which the United States seeks to work with a designated country to bring about change. Subsequently, depending upon the results of these discussions, one or more actions are chosen by the Secretary of State, as required by the IRF Act. Legislative options for CPC actions range from application of sanctions, to a bilateral agreement, to a waiver. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and his office take actions to promote religious freedom in each CPC throughout the year. This

section highlights actions by other U.S. Government officials to promote religious freedom and to encourage the Governments to take positive steps to improve conditions for religious believers. In November 2006, the Secretary redesignated Burma, China, North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Eritrea, and Saudi Arabia. The Secretary designated Uzbekistan as a CPC for the first time. Vietnam was not redesignated a CPC. Further details on U.S. actions in nations designated as CPCs and in other countries may be found in each individual country report.

Burma

Every year since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Burma as a CPC. In 2006, the Secretary continued the designation of a sanction, consisting of a prohibition on exports or other transfers of defense articles and defense services pursuant to the Arms Export Control Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. Government has a wide array of financial and trade sanctions in place against Burma for its violations of human rights. The U.S. Government advocated religious freedom with all strata of society, including Government officials, religious leaders, private citizens, scholars, foreign diplomats, and international business and media representatives. Through outreach and travel, when not blocked by regime officials, Embassy representatives offered support to and exchanged information with many, otherwise isolated, local nongovernmental organizations and religious leaders.

China

The Secretary of State has designated the People's Republic of China a CPC every year since 1999. In 2006, the Secretary continued the designation of a sanction, consisting of the restriction of exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment pursuant to the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. 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 China, condemning abuses while supporting positive trends. In public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Chinese Government to respect citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise religious freedom and to release all those serving prison sentences for religious activities. President Bush raised religious freedom issues during meetings with President Hu Jintao in St. Petersburg in July 2006 and Hanoi in November 2006. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte raised concerns about religious freedom during multiple meetings with senior Chinese officials. The U.S. Ambassador to China and other senior officials highlighted problems of religious freedom and cases of individual religious prisoners of conscience in public speeches and in private diplomacy with Chinese officials.

Eritrea

The Secretary of State first designated Eritrea as a CPC in 2004. As the action under the IRF Act, the Secretary ordered the denial of commercial export to Eritrea of any defense articles and services controlled under the Arms Export Control Act, excluding certain items such as those used for peacekeeping and antiterrorism efforts. Despite repeated attempts, U.S. Embassy officials were not permitted by the Government to meet with religious leaders. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officers have raised the cases of detention and restrictions on unregistered religious groups with officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice, as well as with the leaders of the sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

Iran

Every year since 1999, the U.S. Secretary of State has designated Iran as a CPC 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 that the Iranian Government places on religious freedom. The U.S. Government has expressed strongly its objections to the Government's harsh and oppressive treatment of religious minorities through public statements and reports, support for relevant U.N. and NGO efforts, and cooperative diplomatic initiatives involving other states concerned about religious freedom in Iran. The United States calls on other countries with bilateral relations with Iran to use those ties to press Iran on religious freedoms and human rights. On numerous occasions, the U.S. Department of State has addressed publicly the situation faced by the Iranian Jewish community (guaranteed freedom of worship in Iran's Constitution) and the Baha'is (viewed as apostates by the regime), and the U.S. Government has encouraged other Governments to make similar statements. The U.S. Government has publicly condemned Iran in U.N. resolutions for its abuses of

human rights, basic freedoms, and treatment of religious minorities. A 2005 session of the Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly yielded a successful resolution, cosponsored by the United States, specifically addressing religious freedom issues among other violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In 2006, the General Assembly passed another resolution against Iran, condemning its treatment of the Baha'is.

North Korea

The Secretary of State has designated the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a CPC every year since 2001. In 2006, the Secretary continued the designation of a sanction, consisting of restrictions on normal trade relations and other trade benefits pursuant to the Trade Act of 1974 and the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the DPRK, but regularly raises religious freedom concerns in multilateral fora and bilaterally with other Governments that have diplomatic relations with the country. In December 2006, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution, which the United States had cosponsored, that condemned the DPRK's poor human rights record. In 2005, 2006, and 2007, the U.S. Government funded an international advocacy campaign focused on North Korean human rights. In addition, the State Department continued to provide funding to the National Endowment for Democracy to support Republic of Korea-based NGOs in their efforts to improve and expand monitoring and reporting of the human rights situation in the country. Radio Free Asia and Voice of America also provide regular Korean-language broadcasting. Since his appointment in 2005, Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea, Jay Lefkowitz, has urged other countries, including the Republic of Korea and Japan, as well as the European Union, to join the growing international campaign urging the DPRK to address its human rights conditions and abuses of religious freedom.

Saudi Arabia

The Secretary of State first designated Saudi Arabia as a CPC in 2004. Senior U.S. officials and Embassy officers met with numerous senior Saudi Government and religious leaders regarding religious freedom issues. Despite the fact that religious freedom remains severely restricted in Saudi Arabia, there were positive developments which could lead to important improvements in the future. Through a series of discussions and through public announcements, the Saudi Government confirmed a number of policies to foster greater religious tolerance, to halt the dissemination of intolerant literature and extremist ideology within Saudi Arabia and around the world, to protect the right to private worship and the right to possess and use personal religious materials, to curb harassment by the religious police, to empower its Human Rights Commission, to eliminate discrimination against non-Muslim religious minorities, and to respect the rights of Muslims who do not follow the Government's interpretation of Islam. The Government announced plans and began efforts to implement these and other policies aimed at curbing intolerance. For example, the Saudi Government is overhauling its educational system, including teacher training, curriculum reform, and revising textbooks to remove intolerant references to other religions. It is reforming the procedures under which the religious police operate and retraining the religious police force to ensure that the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims are protected. In view of these developments, the Secretary issued a waiver of sanctions "to further the purposes of the Act."

Sudan

Every year since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Sudan a CPC. Among the numerous U.S. sanctions against Sudan, in 2006 the Secretary continued the designation of one sanction consisting of the use of the voice and vote of the United States to abstain or oppose loans or other uses of the funds of the international financial institutions to or for Sudan, pursuant to the International Financial Institutions Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. Government encouraged the Government of National Unity to fulfill the promises of religious freedom made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Interim National Constitution and made clear that restrictions on religious freedom impede improved relations between the United States and Sudan. The U.S. Embassy has developed working relationships with a number of Muslim and Christian leaders, and U.S. officials met on a regular basis with such leaders in Khartoum, Juba, and other locales.

Uzbekistan

On November 14, 2006, the Secretary of State designated Uzbekistan as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Uzbekistan's restrictive religion law, which makes it difficult or

impossible for many religious groups to obtain legal status, resulted in raids and arrests of religious leaders. There were continuing credible allegations that devout Muslims were arrested on suspicion of membership in extremist groups; some of these were simply conservative Muslims whose beliefs or teachings differed from those of state-sanctioned clerics. Following the CPC designation, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom has held a series of meetings with officials of the Government of Uzbekistan, both in Uzbekistan and in Washington, aimed at forging improvements in religious freedom. Other U.S. officials have also participated in this process to seek important improvements.

PART II: COUNTRY-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

This section provides a summary of conditions in a number of countries where religious freedom is of significant interest. For each country, this section notes the legal situation and relevant policies and gives examples of particular Government abuses or positive steps Governments have taken in the reporting period to promote or protect religious freedom.

Afghanistan

The Afghan Constitution 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." However, it also states that Islam is the "religion of the state" and that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." Decades of war, years of Taliban rule, and weak democratic institutions, including a developing judiciary, have contributed to intolerance manifested in acts of harassment and violence against reform-minded Muslims and religious minorities. Due to societal pressure, some minority religious believers hide their religion and the Afghan Sikh and Hindu populations face a number of problems. Relations among the different sects of Islam in the country continue to be difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a have faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. Despite reform efforts, condemnations of conversions from Islam and censorship increased concerns about citizens' ability to freely practice minority religions. Efforts to reform Afghanistan's judiciary with assistance from the United States and the international community resulted in the Government taking limited steps to increase religious freedom. The Government organized seminars for religious leaders to promote tolerance and moderate views on women's issues versus strict interpretations of Shari'a that justified various forms of oppression and violence.

Burma

The Burmese Government's repressive, authoritarian military regime imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently committed abuses of the right to freedom of religion. Most adherents of registered religions were permitted to worship as they chose, but the Government continued to infiltrate and monitor activities of virtually all organizations, including religious ones. It also systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom and discouraged and prohibited minority religious groups from constructing new places of worship. The Government actively promoted Theravada Buddhism, particularly among minority ethnic groups. Although there were no new reports of forced conversions of non-Buddhists, the Government applied pressure on students and poor youth to convert to Buddhism. Adherence to Buddhism remains generally a prerequisite for promotion to senior Government and military ranks. Anti-Muslim violence continued, as did the close monitoring of Muslims' activities. Restrictions of Christians and other non-Buddhist minority groups also continued throughout the country.

China

The Chinese Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief; however, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor. The Constitution limits protection of the exercise of religious belief to activities which it defines as "normal," and states that religious bodies and affairs are not to be "subject to any foreign domination." Chinese law also prohibits public proselytism. There was little evidence that 2005 regulations on religious affairs improved the situation of religious freedom. They, too, define only Government-approved practices and faiths as normal or legitimate. In most areas of the country, religious believers could worship without difficulty in officially approved venues. However, in some areas there were significant restrictions. Officials in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region tightly controlled religious activity. Three sons of Uighur Muslim activist Rebiya Kadeer received prison sentences and/or fines, and two were reportedly beaten and tortured by authorities. Followers of Tibetan Bud-

dhism, including in Tibet, the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, and Tibetan areas of China, faced restrictions on their religious practice and ability to organize. In September 2006 Chinese border guards fatally shot a 17-year-old Tibetan nun while she attempted to cross into Nepal. Repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and "house" churches continued to be widely reported, with some house church leaders facing detention, formal arrest, and sentences of reeducation or imprisonment. The Government reportedly expelled over one hundred foreign missionaries in the spring of 2007, in what some groups allege was a Government-initiated campaign to expel missionaries and tighten control on Christian house churches prior to the 2008 Olympics. In the spring of 2007, several house churches also reported that the Government interfered with their religious activities and harassed their leaders and members. "Underground" Catholic bishops also faced repression, in large part due to their loyalty to the Vatican, which the Government accused of interfering in China's internal affairs. In January 2007 the Vatican approved the ordination of a mainland-selected Catholic priest to become bishop of Guangzhou Diocese, the first such backing given by the Vatican after bilateral ties were strained in spring 2006. In June 2007 Pope Benedict XVI issued an open letter to Chinese Catholics inviting them to resolve differences and calling on China to engage in "respectful and constructive dialogue," after which a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson said that China advocates improvement in Sino-Vatican relations. The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as "cults" in general, particularly small Christian-based groups and the Falun Gong. Falun Gong practitioners continued to face arrest, detention, and imprisonment, and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse.

Cuba

The Cuban Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice the Government continued to place restrictions on freedom of religion. The Ministry of Interior, through its state security apparatus, continued to monitor the country's religious institutions, including through surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of religious professionals and laypersons. The authorities also monitored church-run publications. The Government permitted apolitical religious activity to take place in Government-approved sites. Some religious figures who criticized the Government's totalitarian system in sermons were subjected to intense harassment. Since 1992 the Communist Party has admitted as members persons who openly declared their religious faith; however, such persons rarely ascended to senior positions in the Government. 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 law allows for the construction of new churches once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government rarely issued construction permits. Government harassment of private houses of worship continued. In 2005 the Government implemented new regulations that restricted the operation of house churches but eased its policy on work permits to foreign clergy.

Egypt

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government declined during the period covered by this report. The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, although the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Islamic law are prohibited. Members of the non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the Government generally worship without harassment; however, tradition and some aspects of the law discriminate against religious minorities, including Christians and particularly Baha'is. 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. On April 24, 2007, the Court of Administrative Justice ruled that the Interior Ministry was not obligated to recognize reconversion by Christian-born converts to Islam. While this ruling was inconsistent with verdicts issued over the previous 3 years by another judge in the same court on behalf of 32 such converts, it reinstated a long-standing Government policy not to provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status. Despite presidential decrees in 1999 and 2005 to facilitate approvals for church repair and rebuilding, many churches continued to encounter the same difficulties as in previous years in obtaining permits. In May and June 2007, officials of the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) arrested five members of "the Quranis," a small group of Muslims who seek to rely largely, if not exclusively, on the Qur'an as the only

authoritative source for Islam. They were subsequently charged with "denigrating religions." One detainee reported that he had been beaten and threatened with rape by an investigator of the SSIS. Sources close to Bahaa al-Accad, a convert from Islam to Christianity who was detained for 25 months without charge, reported that his personal security was threatened by officials of the SSIS following his April 28, 2007 release. On February 22, 2007, Abdel Karim Nabil Suleiman, whose blog entries had contained strongly-worded critiques of the practice of Islam and Al-Azhar's Sunni Muslim orthodoxy, was sentenced to 3 years in prison for "denigrating Islam." Agents of the SSIS reportedly detained a Jehovah's Witness and, while making demeaning comments about the Jehovah's Witnesses, struck the detainee repeatedly and threatened him and his family with ongoing harassment unless he agreed to become an informant on the Jehovah's Witness community. The Government again opposed advances in the respect for religious freedom affecting Baha'is. The Government's appeal of an April 2006 decision by the Administrative Court supporting the right of Baha'i citizens to receive ID cards and birth certificates with religion noted on the documents, resulted in a December 16, 2006, decision to overturn this ruling and maintained the Government prohibition on Baha'i citizens obtaining identity cards. The Government also continued to deny birth certificates and marriage licenses to members of the Baha'i community.

Eritrea

Religious freedom deteriorated further during the course of the reporting period. The Eritrean Government severely restricted the freedom of religion for groups that it had not registered and infringed upon the independence of some registered groups. Following a 2002 decree that religious groups must register, the Government closed all religious facilities not belonging to the country's four principal religious communities: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, and Islam. The Government continued to harass, arrest, and detain members of independent evangelical groups (including Pentecostals), Jehovah's Witnesses, and a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and it sought greater control over the four approved religious groups. The Government also intervened in procedural and administrative decisions of the Eritrean Orthodox Church by supplanting the patriarch in favor of its own candidate. The Government failed to register any of the four religious groups who applied in 2002 for registration, and it restricted religious meetings and arrested individuals during religious ceremonies, gatherings, and prayer meetings. There were also reports of forced recantations. During the reporting period, authorities arrested numerous religious believers not affiliated with the four approved churches. According to some reports, many hundreds of religious detainees continue to be held without due process in harsh conditions that include extreme temperature fluctuations with limited or no access to family.

India

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice. However, some state and local governments, including those of Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, enacted or amended "anti-conversion" laws during the reporting period. The Governor of Rajasthan, later elected to the presidency, refused to sign her state's law, effectively nullifying it. The vast majority of citizens of every religious group lived in peaceful coexistence; however, there were reports of organized societal attacks against minority religious groups. State police and enforcement agencies often did not act swiftly enough to effectively counter societal attacks. Despite Government efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity, although numerous cases were in the courts at the end of the reporting period, including cases in connection with the 2002 Gujarat violence, the 1984 Sikh riots, and attacks against Christians. The U.S. Embassy and its consulates promoted religious freedom in their discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials, discussed reports of harassment of religious believers with key leaders of all significant religious communities, and supported initiatives to encourage religious and communal harmony.

Iran

There was continued deterioration of the extremely poor status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Government actions and rhetoric created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shi'a religious groups, most notably for Baha'is, as well as Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, and members of the Jewish community. Government-controlled media, including broadcasting and print, intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities, particularly the Baha'is. Re-

ports of imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs continued during the reporting period. Baha'i groups often reported arbitrary arrests, expulsions from universities, and confiscation of property. The Iranian Government regards the Baha'i Faith as a heretical Islamic group with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the country's Islamic revolution and continued to prohibit Baha'is from teaching and practicing their faith. (Baha'is view themselves not as Muslims, but as an independent religion with origins in the Shi'a Islamic tradition.) Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only legally recognized religious minorities; however, even members of these groups have reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. While Jews are recognized as a religious minority, during the reporting period there was a rise in officially sanctioned anti-Semitic propaganda involving official statements, media outlets, publications, and books, creating a threatening atmosphere for the Jewish community. The Government vigilantly enforced its prohibition on proselytizing by some Christian groups by closely monitoring their activities, closing some churches, and arresting Christian converts. Members of evangelical congregations are required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Government restrictions on Sufi Muslim groups and houses of worship also became more pronounced in recent years, and Sufis reported the constant harassment and intimidation of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services. There are reports that the Government called for a full ban on the practice of Sufism and reports that the Government required some adherents to sign documents renouncing Sufism. Reportedly, the President called for an end to the development of Christianity in the country as well.

Iraq

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom demonstrated by the Government during the period covered by this report. Government policy and practices generally did not interfere with the free practice of religion; however, the ongoing insurgency significantly harmed the ability of all religious believers to practice their faith. While the presence of varying levels of lawlessness in certain areas permitted criminal gangs, terrorists, and insurgents to victimize citizens, and while this affected persons of all ethnicities and religious groups in such areas, many individuals from various religious groups were targeted because of their religious identity or their secular leanings. Such individuals were victims of harassment, intimidation, kidnapping, and killings. In addition, frequent sectarian violence included attacks on places of worship. This sectarian violence was heightened by the February 22, 2006, attack on the al-Askariya mosque in Samarra, one of the most significant Shi'a mosques in the world, containing the mausoleums of the 10th and 11th imams. Moreover, conservative and extremist Islamic elements continued to exert tremendous pressure on society to conform to their interpretations of Islam's precepts. Although this affected both the Sunni and Shi'a secular Muslim population, non-Muslims were especially vulnerable to pressure and violence, because of their minority status and, often, because of the lack of a protective a tribal structure. While conditions deteriorated during the reporting period, this situation was not due to Government abuse. Since 2003 the Government has called for tolerance and acceptance of all religious minorities and has worked to removed long-standing discriminatory practices.

Israel and Occupied Territories

The Israeli Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for freedom of worship and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There is no Constitution; however, the "status quo" agreement reached at the founding of the state provides that the Government will implement certain policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. For example, the Government does not recognize Jewish marriages performed in the country unless they are performed by the Orthodox Jewish establishment. The Orthodox Jewish establishment also determines who is buried in Jewish state cemeteries, limiting this right to individuals considered "Jewish" by Orthodox standards. Citing violence and security concerns, the Israeli Government has imposed a broad range of strict closures and curfews throughout the Occupied Territories since October 2000. These restrictions significantly impeded freedom of access to places of worship in the West Bank for Muslims and Christians. The construction of the separation barrier by the Government of Israel, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, severely limited access to mosques, churches, and other holy sites. Such impediments were not exclusive to religious believers or to religious organizations. The Israeli Government attempted to lessen the impact on religious communities, by making special arrangements on religious holidays for both Christians and Muslims, but the main complaint remains

inadequate free access arrangements in terms of number of permits issued and lack of smooth access.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) does not have a Constitution; however, the Palestinian Basic Law provides for freedom of religion, and the PA generally respected this right in practice. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion and the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation, but it also calls for respect and sanctity for other "heavenly" religions. President Abbas took steps to eliminate religious incitement, although some incidents still occurred, and the PA sought to protect religious freedom. However, Christians were reportedly subjected to abuse or property extortion by PA officials during the period covered by this report, and the PA did not take action to investigate these injustices. For instance, credible reports continued to arise of PA security forces and judicial officials colluding with criminal elements to seize property illegally from Christian landowners in the Bethlehem area. There were several violent clashes during the reporting period between Israeli police and Muslim worshippers on the Haram al-Sharif. Personal status law for Palestinians is based on religious law. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from Shari'a, while various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status issues for Christians. There were reports of instances in which PA television shows invoked messages that activists considered anti-Semitic or that attempted to delegitimize Jewish history in general.

Laos

During the period covered by this report, the overall status of respect for religious freedom did not significantly change. While respect for non-Protestant groups appeared to improve slightly, respect for Protestant groups appeared to decline in several parts of the country. In most areas, officials generally respected the constitutionally guaranteed rights of members of most faiths to worship, but within strict constraints imposed by the Government. Authorities in some areas continued to display intolerance for minority religious practices, especially by Protestant Christians. Some local officials pressured minority Protestants to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages in Bolikhamsai, Houaphan, and Luang Namtha Provinces. Arrests and detention of Protestants occurred in Luang Namtha, Oudomsai, Salavan, Savannakhet, and Vientiane Provinces. In some areas, minority Protestants were forbidden from gathering to worship. In areas where Protestants were actively proselytizing, local officials have sometimes subjected them to "reeducation." Two Buddhist monks were arrested in Bolikhamsai Province for being ordained without Government authorization. Conflicts between ethnic groups sometimes exacerbated religious tensions.

Maldives

The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion. The Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens be Muslims. Freedom of religion is significantly restricted. The law prohibits the practice by citizens of any religion other than Islam. The President is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Government regulations are based on Islamic law (Shari'a). Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practice their religion only privately, and visitors must refrain from encouraging local citizens to practice any religion other than Islam.

North Korea

Although the Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," genuine religious freedom does not exist, and there was no change in the extremely poor level of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. The cult of personality of Kim Jong-il and his father remained important ideological underpinnings of the regime, at times resembling tenets of a state religion. The Government severely restricts religious freedom, including organized religious activity, except that which is supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the Government. Some foreigners who have visited the country stated that services at state-authorized churches appeared staged and contained political content supportive of the regime. Defector reports continued to allege that they had witnessed the arrests and execution of members of underground Christian churches by the regime in prior years. In March 2006, the Government reportedly sentenced Son Jong-nam to death for "espionage." However, NGOs claimed that the sentence against Son was based, instead, on his contacts with Christian groups in China and his proselytizing activities in the DPRK. It has not been possible to determine whether or not Son has been executed. There is no reliable information on the number of religious prisoners, but there are unconfirmed reports that large numbers of people are incarcerated for their religious beliefs and activities. Prison conditions are harsh; torture and starvation are common. Refugees and defectors who had been in prison stated that pris-

oners held on the basis of their religious beliefs generally were treated worse than other inmates.

Pakistan

Islam is the state religion and the Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islamic principles. The Government took some steps to improve the treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report, but serious problems remained. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice minority faiths fostered religious intolerance, acts of violence, and intimidation against followers of certain religiousgroups. The Ahmadiyya community continued to face governmental and societal discrimination as well as legal bars to the practice of its faith. Blasphemy laws (and similarly, anti-Ahmadiyya laws) provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting the religious feelings of any citizen. These laws are often used to settle personal scores and intimidate reform-minded Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities. In an important step of progress, the Government enacted the Women's Protection Act, which amended the Hudood Ordinances, moving rape and adultery cases from the Shari'a to secular courts. Madrassah reform is an important Government priority. The 2002 Madrassah Registration Ordinance required all madrassahs to register with one of the five independent boards (wafaqs), cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their Governments. The provincial government in Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with conservative Islamic views, such as anti-obscenity measures under which advertising has been torn down and stores have been fined for selling certain western recordings. If implemented, many of these initiatives would impose Islamic law on all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation. The U.S. Government closely monitored the treatment of religious minorities, worked to eliminate the teaching of religious intolerance, and encouraged amendment of the blasphemy laws.

Russia

The practice of religion was generally free for a significant majority of the population, and conditions improved for some minority religious groups while remaining largely the same for most of the population. However, some Federal and local authorities have taken actions that raise concerns about the Russian Government's consistency and vigilance in protecting religious freedom. In addition some local and regional authorities have relied on provisions of the complex 1997 Law on Religion and a 2006 law governing NGOs to restrict several minority religious groups. A 2004 court decision banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow continued to have significant negative ramifications for the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in some regions during the reporting period. A 2007 St. Petersburg Court decision suspended and ordered closed a Scientology Center for noncompliance with inspection and auditing requirements under the new NGO law. Over the past year, three European Court of Human Rights rulings held that the Russian Government violated its international obligations in cases involving the registration of the Salvation Army, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Scientology. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as hostility toward Roman Catholics and other non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Some observant Muslims claimed harassment because of their faith. Instances of religiously motivated violence continued, although it often was difficult to determine whether xenophobic, religious, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Some Russian Orthodox Church clergy have stated publicly their opposition to any expansion of the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other non-Orthodox denominations. Instances of problems in securing entry visas for clergy decreased. The Russian president and Government reacted quickly in condemning a January 2006 attack on a Moscow synagogue.

Saudi Arabia

While overall Government policies continue to place severe restrictions on religious freedom, there were some improvements in specific areas during the period covered by this report. In addition, there were some positive developments in Government policy that, if fully implemented, could lead to important improvements in the future. Non-Muslims and Muslims who do not adhere to the Government's interpretation of Islam continued to face significant political, economic, legal, social, and

religious discrimination. Charges of harassment, abuse, and even killings at the hands of the mutawwa'in (religious police) continued to surface. Saudi textbooks continued to contain statements of intolerance towards Shi'a, Ismailis, Jews, Christians, and other religious groups, and such statements were also made by public officials, teachers, and Government-paid imams. Scores of foreign workers and their family members were arrested for practicing their faith and deported. These kinds of incidents caused many non-Muslims to worship in fear of discovery by the police and mutawwa'in. At the same time, the Government reiterated its policy to halt the dissemination of intolerant literature, combat extremism, and improve the climate of tolerance, both within Islam and toward non-Muslim religious groups. To that end, the Government confirmed that it is reviewing educational materials to remove or revise disparaging references to minority religious traditions; that it is monitoring sermons at Government-supported mosques and will dismiss or retrain imams whose preaching promotes religious extremism; and that it is undertaking to screen out prospective teachers who hold extremist religious views and will dismiss teachers who espouse such views. In addition, the Government appointed more Shi'a judges to the Ja'afari courts in the Eastern Province and one Shi'a and one Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a to the board of the Human Rights Commission. The Government also announced several policies and initiated various measures intended to curb religious freedom violations committed by the mutawwa'in. It also allowed unprecedented media coverage and criticism of the mutawwa'in.

Sri Lanka

The Constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," but it is not recognized as the state religion. While the Government publicly endorses the right of members of other faiths to freely practice their religion, in practice there were problems in some areas. Anti-conversion legislation, first introduced in 2004, remained under consideration. Despite generally amicable relations among persons of different faiths, there was ongoing resistance, in some cases violent, by some Buddhists toward Christian church activity, in particular that conducted by evangelical groups. There were sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and on Ahmadis by Sunni Muslims. Police have been responsive in arresting and prosecuting persons in connection with these incidents.

Sudan

The 2005 Interim National Constitution provides for freedom of religion throughout the country, and there was some improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom in the period covered by this report. However, regional distinctions in the Constitution, negotiated as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), have resulted in disparities in the treatment of religious minorities in the North and the South. The Interim National Constitution preserved Shari'a as a source of legislation in states outside southern Sudan, but recognized "popular consensus" and "the values and the customs of the people of Sudan, including their traditions and religious beliefs," as sources of legislation in the South. The Government of Southern Sudan generally respected the rights of Christians and Muslims in the 10 states of the South, as provided for in its separate interim Constitution. However, the Government of National Unity (GNU) continued to place restrictions on Christians in the North. The national Government required that all students in the North study Islam in school, regardless of whether they were Muslim, and even if enrolled in private Christian schools. The President established the Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the National Capital, a CPA mechanism for protecting religious freedom, by appointing the commission's chairperson during the reporting period. In addition there were noted improvements in the number of building permits issued for churches. Dialogue between Christian and Muslim groups continued under the auspices of both the Sudan Inter-Religious Council, a NGO supported by the GNU, and the Sudan Council of Churches, comprised of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant groups.

Turkmenistan

There was no improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and the Government's treatment of unregistered groups worsened. Following a sharp decrease in harassment of both registered and unregistered groups in late 2006, mistreatment of some registered and many unregistered religious minority group members resumed in February 2007, in a manner similar to that observed in previous reporting periods. During the reporting period there were no indications the Government planned to rescind or modify previous policies regarding religious freedom. All groups must register in order to gain legal status; unregistered religious activity remained illegal and punishable by administrative fines. The Government threatened members of

minority religious groups with fines, loss of employment and housing, and imprisonment because of their beliefs. There were also reports of raids on worship services.

Uzbekistan

The status of religious freedom remained restricted, with a particular worsening for some Pentecostal and other Christian groups during the period of this report. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of some Christian denominations, continued to operate without registration, because they had not satisfied the strict legal requirements for registration. 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. The Government continued its campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups suspected of extremist sentiments or activities, arresting numerous alleged members of these groups and sentencing them to lengthy jail terms. Many of these were suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a banned extremist Islamic political movement, the banned Islamic group Akromiya (Akromiylar), or unspecified "Wahhab" groups. The Government generally did not interfere with worshipers attending sanctioned mosques and granted approvals for new Islamic print, audio, and video materials. A small number of "underground" mosques operated under the close scrutiny of religious authorities and the security services. There was increased harassment and intimidation during the reporting period of certain Protestant and Jehovah's Witness groups in particular.

Venezuela

The Venezuelan Constitution provides for freedom of religion, on the condition that its practice does not violate public morality, decency, or the public order; the Government generally respected this right in practice. Religious groups are required to register to obtain legal status as religious organizations. Registration requirements are largely administrative but stipulate that groups serve the community's social interests. There were some efforts by the Government, motivated by political reasons, to limit the influence of religious groups in certain geographic, social, and political areas. Power was increasingly concentrated in the executive branch and limits placed on free expression. Outspoken religious leaders who criticized this trend were subjected to President Chavez's virulent rhetoric. The President, Government officials, and Government-affiliated media outlets made numerous anti-Semitic comments which created a spillover effect into mainstream society. There was a rise in anti-Semitic vandalism, caricatures, intimidation, and physical attacks against Jewish institutions. Foreign missionaries require special visas to enter the country, and they noted increased difficulties, especially for access to indigenous areas.

Vietnam

The status for the respect of religious freedom and practice continued to experience important improvements during the reporting period. Vietnam deepened its implementation of its 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief and supplemental decrees on religious policy issued in 2005. The national Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA) organized a number of programs to offer training to religious denominations on registration procedures and local authorities on how to implement the national legal framework on religion. Many new churches were registered throughout the country's 64 provinces and a number of religious denominations were registered at the national level. In January 2007, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dzung visited the Vatican and met with Pope Benedict XVI, and in March, an official delegation from the Vatican visited Vietnam as follow-up to the Prime Minister's visit. Vietnamese citizens were generally allowed to practice religion more freely. Despite progress, however, problems remain in the implementation of Vietnam's legal framework on religion. These include slowness, and in some cases inaction, in the registration of Protestant congregations in the northern region and the Northwest Highlands, bureaucratic delays and impediments, ongoing restrictions on religious recruitment, difficulties in the establishment of Catholic seminaries and Protestant pastor training courses, and unresolved land expropriation claims involving a number of religious denominations. While most provincial authorities have been active in implementing the legal framework on religion, a few have been much less so. Nevertheless, most religious groups reported improved conditions.

AFRICA

ANGOLA

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.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 of 14 million. Christianity is the religion of the vast majority of the population, with Roman Catholicism as the largest single religious group. The Catholic Church estimates that 55 percent of the population is Catholic, but this figure can not be verified. Data from the National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR), under the Ministry of Culture, indicate the major Protestant traditions, including the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God, are present in the country but are declining in strength, with an estimated membership of 10 percent of the population. African Christian denominations are gaining membership and 25 percent of the population are believed to be followers. Five percent are believed to belong to the various Brazilian Evangelical churches. A small portion of the rural population practices animism or traditional indigenous religions. There is also a small Muslim community, estimated at 80–90,000 adherents, composed largely of migrants from West Africa and families of Lebanese extraction. There were few declared atheists in the country.

Foreign missionaries operated freely throughout the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government requires religious groups to petition for legal status with the Ministries of Justice and Culture. Legal status gives religious groups the right to act as juridical persons in the court system, secures their standing as officially registered religious groups, and allows them to construct schools and churches. Groups must provide general background information and have at least 100,000 adult adherents to qualify for registration.

The Christian holy days of Christmas and Good Friday are national holidays with no negative impact on other religious groups.

Public schools do not require religious instruction. The Government permits religious organizations and missions with legal status to establish and operate schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Ministries of Justice and Culture currently recognize 85 denominations. More than 800 other religious organizations, many of which are Congolese- or Brazilian-based Christian evangelical groups, have registration applications pending with INAR. They do not meet the membership requirement of at least 100,000 members and are not eligible to receive legal status, but the Government has not barred their

activity. INAR reported that the Muslim community, represented by the Central Mosque of Luanda, was close to meeting the registration requirements and was soon expected to gain official legal status.

Members of the clergy regularly use their pulpits to criticize Government policies, though church leaders report self-censorship regarding particularly sensitive issues. The Catholic Church-owned Radio Ecclesia is broadcast in Luanda Province and frequently hosted spirited debates that spanned the political spectrum and were at times quite critical of Government policies. The Media Law, however, requires non-public radio networks to have a physical presence in a province to broadcast there. Due to its limited financial capacity, this requirement affects Radio Ecclesia's ability to expand outside of Luanda.

The Government banned 17 religious groups in Cabinda on charges of practicing harmful exorcism rituals on adults and children accused of "witchcraft," illegally holding religious services in residences, and not being registered. Although the law does not recognize the existence of witchcraft, abusive actions committed while practicing a religion are illegal. Members of these groups were not harassed, but two leaders were convicted in 2006 of child abuse and sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

In February 2006 the Government was criticized for closing three mosques for holding services that authorities claimed disrupted public order by impeding the flow of traffic. Local Muslim leaders worked with INAR to successfully negotiate an agreement which allowed all mosques to reopen by December 2006.

Muslim leaders also submitted a second request for legal status in March 2006, as their first application submitted in 2004 was improperly prepared. The Islamic Church of Angola expects to gain legal status in 2007.

The Catholic Church confirmed that the Government agreed to fund the construction of schools and churches in restitution for property seized during the Angolan civil war.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Although public attitudes toward Islam were generally negative, cultural differences between Angolan and Muslim West African immigrants were generally cited as the basis for negative views toward Islam, rather than religious intolerance.

Governmental agencies, church groups, and civil society organizations continued campaigns against traditional religions that involve shamans, employ animal sacrifices, or were identified as practicing "witchcraft." The focus of these various programs was on abusive practices that can sometimes stem from traditional indigenous religious groups, not campaigns against witchcraft overall. Various Government agencies held workshops and seminars on child abuse while church-related organizations focused on the doctrinal issues related to such practices as animal sacrifices or the use of shamans. There were periodic reports of child and elder abuse stemming from accusations of "witchcraft," generally in rural areas and smaller cities. In some instances these accusations led to exorcism rituals that included willful neglect and physical abuse. In some cases deaths have been reported. Current cases remained under investigation; however, in the past authorities have arrested and prosecuted those who have abused, injured, or reportedly killed others accused of "witchcraft."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials routinely meet with the country's religious leaders on a variety of issues, including democratization, development, religious freedom, and human rights concerns. Church groups are key members of the country's civil society. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, maintained an ongoing dialogue with the leadership of the country's religious denominations. The Ambassador gave interviews to newspapers and radio in

which she specifically called for recognition of Muslims' right to worship in the country.

BENIN

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 43,483 square miles and a population of 8,078,300. According to the 2002 census, 27.1 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 24.4 percent Muslim, 17.3 percent Vodun, 5 percent Celestial Christian, 3.2 percent Methodist, 7.5 percent other Christian, 6 percent other traditional local religious groups, 1.9 percent other religious groups, and 6.5 percent claim no religious affiliation.

Many individuals who nominally identify themselves as Christian or Muslim also practice traditional local religious beliefs. Among the most commonly practiced is the animist Vodun system of belief, also known as voodoo, which originated in this area of Africa. There are few atheists.

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

There are Christians, Muslims, and adherents of traditional local religious groups throughout the country. However, most adherents of the traditional Yoruba religious group are in the south, while other local religious beliefs are followed in the north. Muslims are represented most heavily in the north and 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 local religious beliefs, or a combination of all of these.

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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state-sponsored religion.

The Constitutional Court determines the legal guidelines that govern religious practice. In recent years this court determined that it is illegal to block the access of any group to its religious services and that criticism of religious belief is a protected free speech right.

The Defense Ministry is permitted to intervene in conflicts between religious groups as a peacekeeping force to ensure public order and social peace, provided that the intervention complies with the principle of state neutrality in the management of religious affairs.

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 was refused permission to register or subjected to unusual delays or obstacles in the registration process. Religious groups are free from taxation.

Government officials accorded respect to prominent leaders of all religious groups by attending their induction ceremonies, funerals, and other religious celebrations.

The President regularly received leaders of all religious groups, and police forces were assigned to provide security to any religious event upon request.

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

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

Soon after his inauguration, the President received leaders and representatives of Christian, Muslim, and traditional indigenous religious groups, respectively.

Ecumenical Day is celebrated every first Wednesday of May and traditionally includes a large celebration of interreligious cooperation in the historic town of Ouidah. Individual religious leaders make an effort to bridge the divide between Christians and Muslims and preach a message of tolerance.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Due to the diversity of religious affiliations within families and communities, religious tolerance was widespread at all levels of society and in all regions. Interfaith dialogue occurred regularly, and citizens respected different religious traditions and practices, including syncretistic beliefs. Many Vodun followers were also Christian or Muslim and tolerant of other 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 other Embassy representatives regularly attended ceremonies associated with various religious groups. Embassy officials also stressed in their public remarks the value and importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

BOTSWANA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 224,710 square miles and a population of 1.68 million, according to the most recent census completed in 2001. An estimated 70 percent of the country's citizens identify themselves as Christians. Anglicans, Methodists, and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa make up the majority of Christians. There are also congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and other Christian denominations. According to the 2001 census, the country's Muslim community, pri-

marily of South Asian origin, numbers slightly more than 5,000. The 2001 census also lists approximately 3,000 Hindus and 700 Baha'is. Members of each community estimate that these figures significantly understated their respective numbers. Approximately 20 percent of citizens espouse no religion.

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

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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. Although it is common for Government meetings to begin with a Christian prayer, members of other religious groups are not excluded from leading non-Christian prayers at such occasions. 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 section of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. The registration process takes 4 to 6 months to complete, on average. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations, although an organization must be registered before it can conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account in a local bank. Any person who holds an official position in, manages, or assists in the management of an unregistered organization is liable to a fine of up to $166 (Pula 1,000) and/or up to 7 years in prison. Any member of an unregistered society is liable to penalties including fines up to $83 (Pula 500) and/or up to 3 years in prison.

Sixty-nine religious groups registered from July 2006 to May 2007; however, during this same period 256 religious groups began the process of registration but had their applications terminated. The applications were automatically terminated after the failure to submit required forms, fees, or constitution within 90 days, as the law mandates. No religious organization was deregistered during the reporting period.

Religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools; it emphasizes Christianity but addresses other religious groups in the country. 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 interest of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health. However, any suspension of religious freedom by the Government must be deemed "reasonably justifiable in a democratic society."

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 AND DISCRIMINATION

During the reporting period, there were no indications of tension between the religious communities. Several religious groups were in the process of registering an official interfaith council which was expected to include representatives of Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Baha'i 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 maintain regular contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country.

BURKINA FASO

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, at times community members forced old women falsely accused of being witches to flee their villages.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 105,689 square miles and a population of 14,326,200. While exact statistics on religious affiliation are not available and vary widely, the Government estimated in its most recent census (1996) that approximately 60 percent of the population practice Islam, and that the majority of this group belong to the Sunni branch, while remaining minorities adhere to the Shi'a, Tijaniyah, or Salafi/Wahhabi branches. The Government also estimated that 24 percent of the population maintains traditional indigenous beliefs, 17 percent practices Roman Catholicism, and 3 percent are members of various Protestant denominations.

Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because incorporating traditional indigenous beliefs and practices is widespread among both Christians and Muslims. Additionally, the majority of citizens practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs to varying degrees, and strict adherence to Christian and Muslim beliefs is often nominal. Almost all citizens are believers in a supernatural order; atheism is virtually nonexistent.

Muslims reside largely around the northern, eastern, and western borders, while Christians live in the center of the country. People practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, has a mixed Muslim and Christian population; however, Bobo-Dioulasso, the country's second largest city, is mostly Muslim. Small Syrian and Lebanese immigrant communities reside in the 2 largest cities and are overwhelmingly (more than 90 percent) Christian.

There are more than 60 different ethnicities in the country. Most ethnic groups are religiously heterogeneous, although the Fulani and Dioula communities are overwhelmingly Muslim.

Foreign missionary groups 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution and laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and provide the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The Government observes and enforces these provisions. The country is a secular state. Islam, Christianity, and traditional indigenous religious beliefs were practiced freely without Government interference. There is no official state religion, and the Government neither subsidized nor favored any particular religion. The practice of a particular religion was not known to confer any advantage or disadvantage in the political arena, the civil service, the military, or the private sector.

The Government establishes the following religious holy days as national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, Ramadan, and Christmas Day.

The Government requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration confers legal status, but it entails no specific controls or benefits. According to article 45 of the Freedom of Association Code, failure to register may result in a fine of approximately $97 to $292 (50,000 CFA to 150,000 CFA). The Government gives all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approves their applications. The Government taxes religious groups only if they engage in commercial activities, such as farming and dairy production.

The Constitution provides freedom of expression in publications and broadcasts, including those by religious groups, unless the judicial system determines that such expression is harming public order or committing slander; the judicial system has never made such a determination. The Government did not deny a publishing or broadcasting license to any religious group that requested one during the period covered by this report.

Religious organizations operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting rights as other entities. 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. Additionally, the Government does not grant special tax preferences to religious organizations operating print or broadcast media.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely and face few, if any, restrictions; however, missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures in pursuit of particular activities.

Public schools do not offer religious instruction. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools. Although school officials have to submit the names of their directors to the Government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the Government does not appoint or approve these officials.

The Government does not fund religious schools or require them to pay taxes unless they conduct for-profit activities. The Government reviews the curriculum of religious schools to ensure that they offer the full standard academic curriculum. The Government, however, does not interfere with the curriculum of supplemental classes offered by private schools, such as classes on the Bible or the Qur'an.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, at times community members forced old women falsely accused of being witches to flee their villages. The Catholic Church funded-Delwende center that houses and feeds women accused of witchcraft reported seven cases of this kind. The Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity, along with various other nongovernmental and religious organizations, also maintained similar shelters in Ouagadougou.

Some Muslims considered the 1996 law against female genital mutilation (FGM) as discriminating against their religious practices and continued performing the procedure. Sometimes non-Muslim FGM practitioners performed the procedure during baptismal ceremonies because the baby was expected to cry during the ceremony.

Unlike in previous reports, there were no reports of tensions 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 and different Islamic organizations cosponsored a number of workshops and public events discussing religious tolerance in the United States and promoting its continued practice locally. Activities also included two iftar celebrations: one for Muslim women leaders and another for leaders of various Muslim groups, and discussions between Muslim-American employees of the Embassy and

local Muslim groups on the topic of religious diversity in the United States. The Embassy also sent two young Muslim leaders to the United States on an International Visitor Program focusing on Muslim life in a democracy. The Embassy maintained contacts with representatives of all the major religious organizations.

BURUNDI

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,747 square miles and a population of 8,390,500. Although reliable statistics on the followers of various religious groups are not available, sources estimate the Christian population to be 67 percent, with Roman Catholics representing the largest group at 62 percent. Protestant and Anglican practitioners comprise the remaining 5 percent. The local representative of the Holy See estimates the Catholic population to be closer to 65 percent. An estimated 23 percent of the population adheres to traditional indigenous religious beliefs; some of the traditional indigenous groups promoted cures for HIV/AIDS and other ailments. The Muslim population is estimated to be as high as 10 percent, the majority of whom live in urban areas. Sunnis make up the majority of the Muslim population, and the remainder is Shi'a.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, promulgated in March 2005, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited. A 1992 law covering nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, is the basis for the recognition and registration of religious bodies.

There is no state religion.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of the Interior. Each association with a religious nature must file the following with the ministry: the denomination or affiliation of the religious institution, a copy of its statutes, the address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the local religious institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative. If an association with a religious nature fails to register with the Ministry, its representative is reminded of the requirement to do so. If the representative does not comply, the place of worship or association is instructed to close down. Although the representative of the religious institution or association can be jailed for 6 months to 5 years for failing to comply with these instructions, during the reporting period no representative received this penalty.

The Government requires that all 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 on the importation by religious institutions of goods destined for social development purposes. The Finance Ministry negotiates these exemptions on a case-by-case basis, and there is no indication of religious bias in the awarding of such exemptions.

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

The Government recognizes Catholic holy days, including the Assumption, the Ascension, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. In 2005 the Government also officially rec-

ognized the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Fitr, commemorating the end of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, which is celebrated at the end of the Hajj.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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

In the past, the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People-National Liberation Force (PALIPEHUTU–FNL) was considered responsible for the killings of religious adherents, including five civilians attending a religious service in Bujumbura Rural Province in June 2005 and Catholic priest Gerard Nzeyimana in Makamba Province in October 2004. No one has been charged in these killings.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials also maintain regular contact with leaders and members of various religious communities. In addition, the Embassy funded a range of human rights and democracy programs supporting religious and civil society organizations.

CAMEROON

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

There were no reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The country is generally characterized by a high degree of religious tolerance.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 183,568 square miles and a population of 18,060,400. Muslim centers and Christian churches of various denominations operate freely throughout the country. Approximately 40 percent of the population is at least nominally Christian, 20 percent is at least nominally Muslim, and 40 percent practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs. The Christian population is divided approximately equally between Catholic and Protestant denominations.

Christians are concentrated chiefly in the southern and western provinces and Muslims reside in large numbers in every province. There is significant internal migration. Large cities have significant populations of both groups, with mosques and churches often located near each other. The two Anglophone provinces of the western region largely are Protestant and the francophone provinces of the southern and western regions are largely Catholic. In the northern provinces, the locally dominant Fulani (or Peuhl) ethnic group is mostly Muslim, but the overall population is fairly evenly mixed between Muslims, Christians, and animists, each often living in its own community. The Bamoun ethnic group of the West Province is largely Muslim. Traditional indigenous religious beliefs are practiced in rural areas throughout the

country but rarely are practiced publicly in cities, in part because many indigenous religious groups are intrinsically local in character.

Missionary groups are present throughout the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no official state religion.

Christian and Islamic holy days are celebrated as national holidays. These include the Christian holy days of Good Friday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, and Christmas Day, and the Islamic holy days of the Feast of the Lamb and Eid al-Fitr, the End of Ramadan.

The Law on Religious Congregations governs relations between the Government and religious groups. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) must approve and register religious groups in order for them 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. There was a growth within the major cities of so-called "sects," which their leaders consider to be subgroups of Protestant denominations; few of these are registered, and all of them operate freely. Although official recognition confers no general tax benefits, it allows religious groups to receive real estate as tax-free gifts and legacies for the conduct of their activities.

To register, a religious denomination must legally qualify as a religious congregation. The 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 MINATD. The file must include a request for authorization, a copy of the group's charter describing planned activities, and the names and functions of the group's officials. The Minister reviews the file and sends it to the presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. The president generally follows the recommendation of the Minister and grants authorization by a presidential decree. The approval process may take up to several years.

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

The MINATD, rather than the judiciary, primarily resolves disputes between or within registered religious groups about control of places of worship, schools, other real estate, or financial assets.

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

The practice of witchcraft is a criminal offense under the national penal code, punishable by a 2- to 10-year prison term.

Several religious denominations operate primary and secondary schools. Although post-secondary education continues to be dominated by state institutions, private schools affiliated with religious denominations, including Catholic, Protestant, and Qur'anic schools, have been among the best schools at the primary and secondary levels for many years. The law charges the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education 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 Department of Private Education performs this oversight function. School attendance—at public, private, or parochial schools—is mandatory through junior high school. The campuses of the Central Africa Catholic University and the International Adventist University are located in the country.

The Catholic Church operates two of the country's few modern private printing presses 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 unauthorized radio stations operating. Two private religious radio stations, the Pentecostal Radio Bonne Nouvelle and Radio Reine (managed by a Catholic priest although not officially sponsored by the Catholic Church), that had been broadcasting without licenses continued to broadcast while awaiting official authorization, as do many other radio stations awaiting their licenses. The Catholic station Radio Veritas has temporary authorization to broadcast and has been broadcasting without incident.

The state-sponsored television station, CRTV, carries 2 hours of Christian programming on Sunday mornings, normally an hour of Catholic Mass and an hour of a Protestant service. There is also one broadcast hour dedicated to Islam on Friday evenings. State-sponsored radio broadcasts Christian and Islamic religious services on a regular basis, and both the radio and television stations periodically broadcast religious ceremonies on national holidays or during national events. State television occasionally broadcasts ecumenical ceremonies on major occasions such as the commemoration of a national event.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The practice of witchcraft is a criminal offense under the national penal code. People generally are prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with some other offense such as murder; however, there were no reports of convictions of witchcraft under this law. The Government distinguishes between witchcraft and traditional indigenous religious practices; witchcraft is defined by the law as attempts to do harm by spiritual means and is a common explanation for diseases.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 2004 the Government responded promptly to assist the U.S. Embassy in the case of the forced conversion of American citizens by a private actor.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, some religious groups reported societal hostility within their regions. Established churches denounced new unaffiliated religious groups, most of which are Protestant, as "sects" or "cults," claiming that they were detrimental to societal peace and harmony. In practice, such denunciation did not inhibit the practice of the unaffiliated religious groups. In the northern provinces, especially in rural areas, societal hostility by Muslims against Christians and persons who practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs continued.

When there have been natural disasters, or to commemorate national events, Christians and Muslims organized ecumenical ceremonies to pray and promote a spirit of tolerance and peace.

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

CAPE VERDE

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Cape Verde is an archipelago consisting of 10 islands, 9 of which are inhabited. It has an area of 1,557 square miles and a population of 458,000, according to the National Statistics Institute. More than 85 percent of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, according to an informal poll taken by local churches. The largest Protestant denomination is the Church of the Nazarene. Other groups include the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Assemblies of God, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and various other Pentecostal and evangelical groups. There are small Baha'i communities and a small but growing Muslim community. The number of atheists is estimated at less than 1 percent of the population.

There is no association between religious differences and ethnic or political affiliations; however, the 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 became the governing party in 2001, some have become supporters of the PAICV due to conflict within the MPD party and dissatisfaction over the latter's performance.

There were 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves.

The Penal Code, which entered into force in 2004, states that violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to a penalty of between 3 months' and 3 years' imprisonment.

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

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

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

Registration is mandatory under the Constitution and the law of associations. There are no special incentives for registering and failure to do so has not resulted in penalty or prosecution. One disadvantage of not registering is the inability of unregistered groups to apply for Government or private loans and benefits as an association.

To register, a religious group must submit to the Ministry of Justice a copy of its charter and statutes, signed by the members of the group. 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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, although it prohibits what the Government considers to be religious fundamentalism or intolerance and establishes fixed legal conditions based on group registration with the Ministry of Interior. The Government generally respected the right to religious freedom in practice; however, witchcraft is a criminal offense under the penal code.

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

Private actors continued to abuse and discriminate against those accused of witchcraft.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 242,000 square miles and a population of 4,369,000. According to a 2005 census report, Protestants compose 51 percent of the population, Catholics 29 percent, and Muslims 10 percent. The remainder of the population practices traditional beliefs (animism), although many traditional beliefs are also incorporated into Christian and Islamic practice throughout the country.

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

There were many foreign missionary groups operating in the country. Many missionaries who left the country due to fighting between rebel and Government forces in 2002 and 2003 returned to the country and resumed their activities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally permitted adherents of all religious groups to worship without interference. The Constitution prohibits what the Government considers to be religious fundamentalism or intolerance. The constitutional provision prohibiting religious fundamentalism was widely perceived as targeting Muslims; however, it is not supported by any additional legislation.

Although witchcraft or sorcery is a criminal offense punishable by execution under the penal code, most sentences are from 1 to 5 years in prison or a fine of up to $1,500 (817,836 CFA francs). No one accused of witchcraft received the death penalty during the reporting period, but numerous individuals were arrested for these practices, often in conjunction with some other offense, such as murder. Accusations of witchcraft appear unrelated to religious practice and are often associated with interpersonal disputes. The Government reinforces societal attitudes about the efficacy of sorcery by arresting and detaining persons accused of witchcraft, often under the guise of protecting the accused from harm by people within their communities.

During a typical trial of someone accused of sorcery, traditional doctors and neighbors are called as witnesses, and cuttings of clothes are submitted as evidence. In the past, the Minister of Justice acknowledged that investigations into allegations of sorcery were difficult. Authorities free most people imprisoned for witchcraft and sorcery offenses for lack of evidence; however, Government authorities in May 2007

identified 8–10 inmates as being imprisoned for witchcraft in Bimbo, the women's prison in Bangui.

Religious groups that the Government considered "subversive," a term not specifically defined by the Government, are subject to sanctions by the Ministry of Interior. When imposing 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 may also intervene in religious organizations to resolve internal conflicts about property, finances, or leadership within religious groups.

The Government celebrates several Christian holy days as national holidays including Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, the Monday after Pentecost, and All Saints' Day. The Government does not officially celebrate Islamic holy days; however, Muslims are allowed to take these days off from work. There is no state religion.

Religious groups (except for traditional indigenous religious groups) are required by law to register with the Ministry of Interior. Registration is free and confers official recognition and certain limited benefits such as customs duty exemption for the importation of vehicles or equipment. The administrative police of the Ministry of Interior monitored groups that failed to register; however, the police did not attempt to impose any penalty on such groups.

Religious organizations and missionary groups are free to proselytize and worship throughout the country.

Students are not compelled to participate in religious education, and they are free to attend any religious program of their choosing. Although the Government does not explicitly prohibit religious instruction in public schools, such instruction is not part of the overall public school curriculum, nor is it common. Religious instruction is permitted without Government interference in private schools. Private Catholic schools generally include 1 hour of religious education per week.

The Government grants religious groups 1 day each week, of their choosing, to make free broadcasts on the official radio station. All religious representatives that wish to broadcast on public airwaves are required to pay a fee when covering certain activities or making religious advertisements. There are four religious broadcasting stations—two Protestant, one Catholic, and one Islamic.

The Government continued to take positive steps to promote religious freedom, such as the organizing of interfaith services for the purpose of promoting peace and interfaith dialogue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion, with the exception of any practice considered subversive or witchcraft related. The Government continued to ban the Unification Church, claiming that it is a subversive organization likely to disturb the peace because of its alleged training of younger church members as paramilitaries. In December 2006 President Bozize ordered security forces to burn several houses belonging to deacons of Kina Baptist Church in Bangui in response to the deacons' burning of a pastor's house following an interpersonal dispute. Security forces arrested two deacons and beat one of them before releasing them.

The Government maintained burdensome legal requirements that restricted the activities of some groups. Two of the churches suspended by the Government in 2003 failed to reopen, unable to prove they had a minimum of 1,000 members and church leaders who graduated from what the Government considered high caliber religious schools.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government approved the reopening of a Protestant church in Bangui that had been closed by the Government in March 2006 after authorities learned that two factions within the church were planning to fight each other with knives. The church members later reconciled.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Private actors continued to abuse and discriminate against people accused of witchcraft. Although there is widespread belief in the efficacy of sorcery, accusations

of witchcraft generally arose from interpersonal disputes, not from specific religious or cultural practices.

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. Although many traditional indigenous religious groups include or accommodate belief in the efficacy of witchcraft, they generally only approve of harmful witchcraft for defensive or retaliatory purposes. Witchcraft was a common explanation for diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Government authorities sentenced four residents of Bangui's Miskine suburb to more than 10 years in prison for the 2005 killing of a woman they accused of being a witch. Although courts have tried, convicted, and sentenced some persons for crimes committed against suspected witches in the past, violence against these individuals continued.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

CHAD

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, at times, the Government limited this right for certain groups.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, although some tensions between different Muslim groups and between Muslims and Christians were reported.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 495,755 square miles and a population of 9,885,700. More than half of the population is Muslim, approximately one-third is Christian, and the remainder practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs or no religion at all. Most northerners practice Islam, and many southerners practice Christianity or traditional indigenous religious beliefs; however, population patterns are becoming more complex, especially in urban areas, and anecdotal evidence indicates that Muslim conversion is on the rise in areas that were previously Christian or animist. Many citizens, despite having stated religious affiliations, do not practice their religion regularly.

The vast majority of Muslims are adherents of a moderate branch of mystical Islam (Sufism) known locally as Tijaniyah, which incorporates some local African religious elements. A small minority of Muslims (5 to 10 percent) hold more fundamentalist beliefs, which in some cases may be associated with Saudi-oriented belief systems such as Wahhabism or Salafism.

Roman Catholics represent the largest Christian denomination in the country. Most Protestants, including the Nigeria-based "Winners Chapel," are affiliated with various evangelical Christian groups. Members of the Baha'i and Jehovah's Witnesses religious communities also are present. Both religious groups were introduced after independence in 1960 and therefore are considered "new" religious groups.

Foreign missionaries representing numerous religious groups continue to proselytize in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government banned the religious group Al Faid al-Djaria and indirectly monitors Islamic activities through the pro-Government High Islamic Council. The Constitution also provides that the country shall be a secular state; however, some policies favor Islam in practice. For example, a committee composed of members of the High Council for

Islamic Affairs and the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior organizes the Hajj and the Umra. In the past the Association of Evangelical Churches criticized Government-sponsored Hajj trips as eroding the traditionally secular stance of the country.

While the Government is legally obligated to treat all religious groups or denominations equally, non-Muslims allege that Muslims receive preferential status. In the past the Government reportedly accorded public lands to Muslim leaders for the purpose of building mosques but required representatives of other religious groups to purchase land at market rates to build places of worship.

The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs oversees religious matters. Working under the Minister of the Interior, the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs is responsible for arbitrating intercommunal conflicts and ensuring religious freedom. The Director also monitors religious practices within the secular state. An independent religious organization, the High Council for Islamic Affairs, oversees all Islamic religious activities, including the supervision of Arabic language schools and higher institutions and the representation of the country in international Islamic meetings.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs, in coordination with the president, also has the responsibility of appointing the grand imam—a spiritual leader for all Muslims in the country who oversees each region's high imam and serves as head of the council. In principle, the grand imam has the authority to restrict proselytizing by other Islamic groups throughout the country, regulate the content of mosque sermons, and exert control over activities of Islamic charities operating in the country. The current grand imam, Sheikh Hissein Hassan Abakar, a representative of the generally moderate Sufi (Tijaniyah) branch of Islam, is viewed as a generally moderate religious figure. He has had his authority challenged by followers of other sects of Islam who adhere to more fundamentalist teachings derived from eastern and northern Africa and the Middle East.

Religious leaders are also involved in managing the country's wealth. 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 4 years. In 2004 the Muslim representative handed responsibilities over to a Catholic priest designated by the Christian community. The mandate of the Christian representative at the College ended in June 2007; at the end of the reporting period, the College had not named the Muslim representative for the next 4 years, but a decision was expected soon.

The Government requires religious groups, including both foreign missionary groups and domestic religious groups, to register with the Ministry of the Interior's Department of Religious Affairs. The Department created two separate services (Muslim and Christian) during the reporting period. Registration takes place without discrimination and is interpreted as official recognition. Despite popular perceptions to the contrary, registration is not intended to confer tax preferences or other benefits to religious groups.

The Government prohibits activity that "does not create conditions of cohabitation among the populations." This prohibition is understood to mean regulating groups who advocate sectarian tensions in the country. During the period covered by this report, the Government banned the Al Mountada al Islami and the World Association for Muslim Youth for portraying violence as a legitimate precept of Islam.

Generally, foreign missionaries did not face restrictions; however, they must register and receive authorization from the Ministry of Interior to circulate within the country, as do other foreigners traveling and operating throughout the country. There were no reports that the Government withheld authorization from any group.

Public schools conduct instruction in French, and public bilingual schools conduct classes in French and Arabic. The Government prohibits religious instruction in public schools but permits all religious groups to operate private schools without restriction. The poor quality of Chad's educational system has prompted many Muslim families to look to Islamic schools as an opportunity for educating children who would otherwise have little or no access to formal schooling. Most large towns have at least one or two private religious schools. Although the Government does not publish official records on school funding, many Islamic schools were commonly understood to be financed by Arab donors (governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals), particularly from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Libya.

In the past several human rights organizations have reported on the problem of the mahadjirin children, students of certain Islamic schools who are forced by their teachers to beg for food and money. There were no credible estimates as to the number of mahadjirin children. The High Council for Islamic Affairs appealed for an immediate end to such practices, and the Government called for the closure of such

schools. Despite attempted reforms, the schools remained open during the reporting period.

Among the numerous private radio stations, religious organizations own several stations broadcasting throughout the country (six Christian and two Islamic). Officials closely monitored radio stations run by both nonprofit and commercial groups.

The Government celebrates both Christian and Islamic holy days as national holidays. Islamic national holidays include Eid al-Adha, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr. Christian holidays include Easter Monday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas Day. It is not uncommon for Muslims and Christians to attend each other's festivities during these holidays.

While most interfaith dialogue takes place on a voluntary basis and not through Government intervention, the Government was generally supportive of these initiatives. On March 8, 2007, the Government initiated a campaign for peace, and Christian organizations organized a peaceful march to support the initiative. The Muslim religious establishment also attended, specifically the Imam of the grand mosque on behalf of the High Council of Islamic Affairs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Al Faid al-Djaria (also spelled Al Faydal Djaria), a Sufi group that adheres to a mystical form of Islam and is found in the Kanem, Lake Chad, and Chari Baguirimi areas, continued to be banned during the period covered by this report. The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs, the High Council for Islamic Affairs, and certain Ulema (Muslim religious authorities) objected to some of Al Faid al-Djaria's customs, such as the incorporation of singing, dancing, and the intermixing of sexes during religious ceremonies, which they deemed un-Islamic. During the reporting period, the Minister of Interior's 2001 ban on Al Faid al-Djaria continued as the group's case remained in court; however, the group still carried out activities in the Chari Baguirmi region of the country.

The Government is believed to monitor some Islamic organizations, such as the Salafi/Wahhabi group Ansar al Sunna, which were well funded by Arab donors and able to use money and other material incentives to encourage adherence to their more austere interpretation of Islam.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion carried out by the Government; however, there were reports of forced conversions of prisoners to Islam by other prisoners. Reports of such cases are disputed and many observers, including human rights groups, find it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used. According to the Government, such cases are due to the violent nature of certain groups within the jail, who use violence against other prisoners and try to extort money.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, although there was occasional tension between Christians and Muslims as well as between more fundamentalist and more moderate Muslims. During the period covered by this report, there were regular meetings between key religious leaders to discuss peaceful collaboration among their groups.

In April 2007 the Association of Evangelical Churches appealed to the Government for additional assistance in ending the conflict between nomadic herders (who are primarily Muslim) and local farmers (who are primarily Christian) in the southern part of the country; however, the Government did not respond to the appeal.

In January 2007 the Catholic Church and Association of Evangelical Churches sent a second official protest to the Government for its failure to respond to a February 2006 rally against the Danish cartoons that resulted in damage to several Christian properties and injury to an evangelical missionary. The Government did not officially respond to the complaint during the reporting period.

The marketplace violence between Christians and Muslims in the southern town of Bebedja that resulted in 12 dead and 21 wounded in 2004 remained a source of tension among the local populace. Some victims accused the Government of failing to investigate the cases thoroughly and conduct proper trials.

There were reports of tensions within the Muslim community. Such tensions arose from differences between the Tijaniyahs leading the High Council for Islamic Affairs

and more fundamentalist groups regarding interpretations of practices, preaching, and the leading of prayers.

Most interfaith dialogues that attempted to address Christian-Muslim and Muslim-Muslim tensions were facilitated by the groups themselves and not through Government intervention. During the reporting period, religious groups met regularly to try and resolve sources of tension and promote greater collaboration. During these encounters, leaders discussed problems of peaceful cohabitation, tolerance, and respect for religious freedom. These dialogues were usually initiated by the Commission for Peace and Justice (CDPJ), a Catholic organization, and both Christian and non-Christian groups participated. CDPJ also held events that brought together members of the Islamic and Christian communities to discuss issues such as child domestics and herders.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The Embassy continued to build ties with the Muslim community through a wide variety of outreach programs with the Grand Imam, the High Islamic Council, and imams in most regions to promote tolerance, mutual understanding, and human rights.

Embassy officials attended the closing ceremony of a 5-day training seminar on human rights for local imams and marabouts (personal spiritual leaders who often preside over small-scale religious ceremonies). Funded by the Embassy, the Islamic Association for Justice, a local NGO, organized the seminar, which trained approximately 30 religious leaders on topics such as religious freedom, women's rights, educational equality, and rule of law.

In addition to meeting with religious and community leaders, the Embassy also sponsored the visit of an U.S. Muslim leader who met with numerous religious, civil society, and academic groups. His visit gave an appreciation of the role religious freedom plays in providing peace and stability in diverse communities such as the United States.

The participation of Muslim leaders in the U.S. Government's International Visitor Program also strengthened Embassy relations with Muslim communities. While focused on understanding U.S. societal, cultural, and political processes, this program also highlights the role of religion and religious tolerance in U.S. politics and society.

UNION OF THE COMOROS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government continued to limit this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government, which was sometimes limited, during the period covered by this report. While Government authorities continued to prohibit Christians from proselytizing, there were no known instances where the local authorities and population restricted the right of Christians to practice other aspects of their faith.

There was societal discrimination against non-Muslims in some sectors of society; however, accounts of social pressure were anecdotal. Society treated citizens who converted to Christianity more harshly than foreigners who practiced the faith. Some family and community members harassed citizens who joined non-Muslim faiths and chased them out of their schools and villages for "evangelizing Muslims."

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 838 square miles and a population of 711,000. Ninety-nine percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. There is no sharp divide between Sunni and Shi'a, and most Muslims respect the doctrinal differences between the two branches of Islam. Foreigners living on the islands number several hundred, and include Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of other Christian groups including Roman Catholics and Protestants.

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, but the Government continued to limit this right in practice. While the Constitution does not proclaim Islam as the official religion, it states that citizens will draw principles and rules that will govern the country from Islamic religious tenets.

The 2002 Constitution reincorporates Ndzuwani (Anjouan), Ngazidja (Grand Comore), and Moheli into a new federation that grants the islands greater autonomy. There are no legal restrictions that prevent Christians from attending church, and non-citizen Christians are allowed to practice their faith without Government intervention as long as they do not attempt to convert citizens. Foreigners caught proselytizing for religions other than Islam are subject to deportation.

While the law allows non-Muslims to practice their religion, it prohibits citizens from converting from Islam. The 2002 amended Constitution upholds religious freedom; however, the pre-existing Penal Code prohibits conversion from Islam and has yet to be modified to reflect this standard. Although enforceable, this law is rarely applied.

Government authorities continue to prohibit non-Muslims from proselytizing. A law dating from the early 1980s states "whoever divulges, promotes, or teaches Muslims a religion other than Islam will be punished with a 3-month prison sentence and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Comoran Francs." However, in practice the Government does not impose this fine.

The Grand Mufti is part of the Government and manages a department that handles issues concerning religion and religious administration. The Grand Mufti's position is attached to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and he counsels the Government on matters of Islamic faith and ensures that Islamic laws are respected. He is nominated by the President. The Grand Mufti periodically consults 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.

While the study of Islam is not compulsory in public schools, the tenets of Islam are sometimes taught in conjunction with the Arabic language in public schools at the middle school level. There are no separate provisions made for religious minorities in public schools; however, foreigners can request that their children not receive Islamic instruction or Arabic language training. Almost all children between the ages of 4 and 7 also attend schools to learn to recite and understand the Qur'an, although attendance is not compulsory for religious minorities. There are more than 10 private schools on the island of Ngazidja (Grand Comore), none of which are specifically non-Muslim.

Several Islamic holy days, including the Islamic New Year, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr, are national holidays.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government does not ban specific religions or religious factions. The Government allows organized religious groups to establish places of worship, train clergy to serve believers, and assemble for peaceful religious activities. However, most non-Muslim citizens did not openly practice their faith for fear of potential legal repercussions for proselytizing.

There were no reports of Government sponsorship of speech or materials that foster intolerance or hatred toward any religious groups.

The Government does not prohibit, restrict, or punish parents for raising their children in accordance with religious teachings and practices of their choice.

There are no specific religious requirements for membership in the ruling party.

The Government did not designate religion on passports or national identity documents, either explicitly or in code.

The Government prohibited the distribution of religious literature, clothing, and symbols. The International Church of Moroni was allowed to import 10,000 gift boxes in April 2007 provided the boxes did not contain religious literature, symbols, or clothing. In 2006 the organization was prohibited from distributing gift boxes of toys for local children containing cross necklaces. In 2006 authorities on Grand Comores barred the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Who Will Follow Me?,

created by the Protestant Church in Moroni, from distributing imported t-shirts emblazoned with the NGO's name in Comoran.

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

On July 6, 2006, in a general amnesty decreed by President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi in celebration of Independence Day, prisoners were released who had been arrested in the preceding 6 months. Among them were four citizens who were convicted of "evangelizing Muslims" for hosting Christian religious debates in a private residence. This was the only known case of religious detainees or prisoners during the reporting period. This was the only reported instance where the Government imposed fines, later waived, for unauthorized religious activity. Local police supported the village of Ndruani's decision to chase out the "evangelizers."

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There is societal discrimination against non-Muslims, particularly Christians, in some sectors of society. All citizens face societal pressure to practice elements of Islam, particularly during the month of Ramadan. Most societal pressure and discrimination occurs behind closed doors at the village level, far from the eyes of the Government or media. The extent of de facto discrimination typically depends on the level of involvement of local Islamic teachers. Most non-Muslim citizens did not openly practice their faith for fear of societal rejection. Persons who raise their children with non-Muslim religious teachings face societal discrimination. Societal pressure and intimidation continued to restrict the use of the country's three churches to non-citizens.

There is concern that Islamic fundamentalism is increasing as young citizens return to the country following Islamic theological studies abroad and seek to impose a stricter adherence to Islamic religious law on their family members and associates; in response, the Union Government has established a university to give young citizens the option of pursuing university studies 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. A representative from the U.S. Embassy in Madagascar met with religious leaders and NGOs on the island of Ngazidja (Grand Comore) in April 2007 to discuss religious tolerance and religious freedom concerns.

The Embassy in Madagascar distributed the Ambassador's opinion-editorial on religious tolerance and the newly elected Muslim U.S. Congressman to Comoran media on April 19, 2007. The Ambassador regularly raised the importance of religious tolerance and concern over Islamic fundamentalism in meetings with Government officials, including President Sambi. In public and private, President Sambi professed moderate Islam and decried radicalism.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The Constitution, approved in a national referendum in December 2005 and formally adopted in February 2006, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice, provided that worshipers did not disturb public order or contradict commonly held morals.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, there continued to be credible reports that families abandoned or abused a number of children and elderly persons accused of witchcraft.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 905,000 square miles and a population of 65,751,500. Approximately 55 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 30 percent is Protestant, and less than 5 percent each Kimbanguist and Muslim. The remainder largely practices traditional indigenous religious beliefs. There were no statistics available on the percentage of atheists. Minority religious groups include, among others, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Coptic (Orthodox) Christians.

Most religious groups are scattered throughout the country and are widely represented in cities and large towns. Muslims are mainly concentrated in the provinces of Maniema, Orientale, and Kinshasa. Members of the ethnically based spiritual and political movement Bunda dia Kongo reside predominately in Bas Congo.

Foreign missionaries operate freely within the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution adopted in 2006 provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full, and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

A statutory order on the Regulation of Nonprofit Associations and Public Utilities provides for and regulates the establishment and operation of religious 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, no one invoked this law in the period covered by this report. Although the law restricts the process of recognition, officially recognized religions are free to establish places of worship and 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 operated 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 the Government generally allowed foreign missionaries to proselytize and did not interfere with their activities.

Public schools permit religious instruction, and religious groups operate many public schools. Religious education is required for all students in religious schools. Parents may choose to send their children to any school, religious or nonreligious.

The Government supported interfaith understanding and consulted with the country's five major religious groups (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Islamic, and Kimbanguist). The Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders served as an informal forum for religious leaders to gather and discuss issues of concern.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. A Protestant bishop served as president of the transitional Senate, and a Catholic priest as president of the Independent Electoral Commission.

Religious figures were not exempt from violent crimes committed by security forces. For example, in March 2007 military men in uniform shot and killed a Catholic priest in Rutshuru territory in North Kivu. The assailants reportedly entered the convent of Jomba, demanded food and drinks, and then shot the priest, who later died in a Rwandan hospital. The assailants were reported to have been followers of renegade General Laurent Nkunda. The brigade commander promised an inquiry, but no results were made public and no suspects arrested.

Bundu Dia Kongo (BDK), an ethnically-based spiritual and political movement in Bas-Congo province, continued to call for the reestablishment of an "ethnically pure" Kongo kingdom, encompassing sections of the country and also Angola and the Republic of Congo. Members of the separatist group clashed with security forces. For example, on January 31 and February 1, 2007, security forces confronted BDK demonstrators after the demonstrators killed 10 policemen/soldiers and 2 civilians before breaking into Government buildings, erecting illegal traffic barricades, and stopping and harassing civilians. This confrontation resulted in more than 100 civilian and security force deaths. In addition, on June 30, 2006, heavily armed soldiers of the

national army in the Bas-Congo Province town of Matadi fired indiscriminately at a demonstration by BDK separatists after a BDK member attacked and killed a soldier. The soldiers killed 13 civilians and injured 20. While the security forces responded with excessive force, their reaction was to BDK attacks on civilians, police, and soldiers. Both the United Nations Organization Mission (MONUC) and a National Assembly committee completed investigations on the violence. The MONUC report blamed both sides in the conflict, while the National Assembly had not released its findings to the public by the end of the reporting period.

While the Government generally did not interfere with foreign missionaries, they were not exempt from general restrictions on freedom of movement imposed on all persons by security force members who erected and manned roadblocks, at which they often solicited bribes.

The High Media Authority (HAM) may suspend stations, religious or secular, for hate speech and calls for ethnic violence. During the reporting period, the Government banned all religious radio and television stations from broadcasting political and news programs because these were not consistent with their licenses. In practice the stations did not comply with the ban, and the Government did not sanction them. Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports of the HAM suspending a religious broadcasting station.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In eastern areas of the country, where significant numbers of armed groups remained active, religious freedom was not abused. However, armed groups attacked both religious and nonreligious individuals and institutions as part of the general population. There was no evidence that religion was the motivating factor in any attacks during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, many families continued to accuse children and elderly persons of practicing witchcraft and to drive them from their homes.

As in past reporting periods, there were reports of incidents in which individuals attacked, tortured, killed, or drove from their homes individuals suspected of witchcraft. There is a common belief in the region that some persons have the power to cast spells on others; accusations of witchcraft can cause widespread fear in a community. There continued to be reports that leaders of certain revival churches or small evangelical Protestant churches exploited fear of witchcraft by either encouraging families to drive accused witches from their homes or performing costly and painful exorcisms in which victims may be locked in boxes for long periods of time, starved for several days, or receive other harsh treatment.

There were reports of adults killing children accused of sorcery. For example, a father in the Equateur Province town of Zongo threw his 5-month-old baby into a river in September 2006 for alleged sorcery, resulting in the baby's death. Days earlier adults in the provincial capital of Mbandaka threw a 15-year-old boy in the river for sorcery, resulting in the boy's death. Police made arrests in both cases. Officials did not charge, prosecute, or punish anyone for similar crimes reported in previous reporting periods.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials regularly met with religious leaders throughout the country.

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 132,000 square miles and a population of 3,800,600. Approximately half of its citizens are Christian; of these an estimated 90 percent are Roman Catholic. Other denominations include Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. There is a growing Muslim community, estimated at 2 percent of the population. Most Muslim workers in urban centers are immigrants from West Africa and Lebanon, with some also from North Africa. The West African immigrants arrived mostly from Mali, Benin, Togo, Mauritania, and Senegal. The Lebanese are primarily Sunni Muslims. There is also a large Chadian Muslim population.

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

Mystical or messianic practices (particularly among the ethnic Lari population in the Pool region) have been associated with opposition political movements, including some elements of the armed insurrection in the southern part of the country from 1997 to 2001. While the association persists, its influence has diminished considerably since 2003.

Several foreign missionary groups 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no official state religion, and the Constitution specifically forbids discrimination on the basis of religion.

All organizations, including religious organizations, businesses, unions, and charitable or nonprofit societies, must register with and be approved by the Government. There were no reports of discrimination against religious groups in this process, although all state 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 holy days of Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, and All Saints' Day as national holidays. Muslim holy days are not nationally observed; however, they are respected. For example, employers grant leave for those who wish to observe holy days not on the national calendar.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Although uncommon, interreligious marriage was generally socially acceptable. Children of majority and minority religious groups usually sat side-by-side in school. In practice, religion was generally kept separate from public education. Religious tolerance was greater in urban areas than in rural areas. In some forest

communities where there are pygmy populations, there is some discrimination against them in education and employment as well as intolerance for their cultural practices, including at times their animist religious practices.

A joint ecumenical council, which meets yearly in February, represents all organized 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. These discussions include highlighting the importance of religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the presidency, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the National Assembly. The U.S. Embassy also has implemented programs with key civil society groups that address these issues. U.S. Government funding continued to assist the local branch of CARITAS (affiliated with Catholic Relief Services and local church organizations), which implemented several grassroots projects in rural areas.

COTE D'IVOIRE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice, although ethnic discrimination paralleling differences in religious affiliation and resulting from the ongoing political conflict continued.

The Government continued to experience political instability as a result of the failed 2002 coup attempt that led to a de facto division between the northern and southern regions of the country. Since 2003 the major parties involved in the conflict signed numerous peace accords, including the Linas-Marcoussis Accord, but none resulted in sustained peace or reconciliation. In March 2007, after extensive negotiations mediated by Burkina Faso President Compaore between Government and ex-rebel representatives, President Gbagbo and ex-rebel leader Guillaume Soro signed an agreement in Ouagadougou establishing a new transitional government with Soro as Prime Minister and a commitment to hold presidential elections in 2008.

Although the country's political conflict lay along ethnic rather than religious lines, political and religious affiliations tended to follow ethnic lines; consequently, some religious affiliation was an important marker of political alliance. Many ethnic northerners, for example, were Muslim. As a result, the Government targeted many Muslims as suspected rebels and rebel sympathizers during the height of the crisis.

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

Relations among the various religious groups were less strained than in the past; however, there continued to be some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of traditional indigenous beliefs. Strong efforts by religious and civil society groups helped prevent the political crisis from turning into a religious conflict.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 124,500 square miles and a population of 18,013,400. An estimated 35 to 40 percent of the country is Christian or syncretistic, practicing a mixture of Christian and indigenous religious beliefs. Approximately 35 percent of the population is Muslim, while an estimated 25 to 30 percent of the population practices traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Many persons who are nominally Christian or Muslim also practice some aspects of traditional indigenous religious beliefs, particularly as economic or political conditions worsened.

Christian groups include the Roman Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Southern Baptist Church, Coptics, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The largest Protestant church is the Protestant Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire. Evangelical groups such as the Shekinah Glory Ministries and the Assemblies of God also are active. Syncretistic churches include the Harrist Church (an African Protestant denomination founded in the country in 1913 by a Liberian preacher named William Wade Harris), Primitive Protestant Church, God's Soldiers (founded by an Ivoirian woman), and Mes-

sianic Church. Bossonism, a traditional religious practice from the Akan ethnic group, is also practiced.

Other religious groups with a presence in the country include Buddhism, the Baha'i Faith, and the International Association for the Conscience of Krishna. Additionally, many religious groups in the country are associated with religious groups in the United States.

Approximately 70 percent of foreigners living in the country are Muslim and 20 percent are Christian, with small percentages practicing other religious beliefs, including Judaism.

There has been an increase in the membership of evangelical churches. Missionary work, urbanization, immigration, and higher education levels are believed to have contributed to a decline in the percentage of practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Many of these practitioners continue to convert to Christianity and Islam.

Muslims reside in the greatest numbers in the northern half of the country; however, they are becoming increasingly numerous in the cities throughout the country due to immigration, migration, and interethnic marriages. According to the most recent census (1998), Muslims compose 45.5 percent of the total urban population and 33.5 percent of the total rural population.

Generally, the north is associated with Islam and the south with Christianity and other traditional religious groups. Both Catholics and Protestants reside in the southern and central regions. Additionally, Catholics are concentrated in the east, while Protestants reside in the southwest. Practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs are concentrated in rural areas.

Political and religious affiliations tend to follow ethnic lines. For example, the Mande and Voltaic groups, which include the Malinke and Senufo people, are largely Muslim. The Akan ethnic group, which includes the Baoule and Agni people, tends to be Catholic. There is also some correlation between religion and political affiliations and socio-economic class. For example, most Muslims favor the opposition Rally of Republicans (RDR) party; additionally, the merchant class is mostly Muslim.

Immigrants from other parts of Africa are at least nominally Muslim or Christian.

Missionaries 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 respected this right in practice. Although there is no state religion, the Government informally favors Christianity for historical and ethnic reasons.

In the past, the Government informally favored the Catholic Church and consequently gave Catholic Church leaders a much stronger voice in Government affairs than their Islamic counterparts. Such preferential treatment led to feelings of disenfranchisement among some Muslims.

Muslims continued to be underrepresented in the legislature, largely because the RDR party, dominated by Muslims, boycotted the 2000 legislative elections. During the reporting period, Muslims represented 12 out of 32 ministers in the Government led by former rebel leader Guillaume Soro.

In addition to the legislature, Muslims continued to be disproportionately underrepresented in media outlets, such as radio and television. Of the approximately 88 radio stations in the Government-controlled zone, for example, there were 7 Catholic stations, 1 evangelical, and 1 Islamic.

Southerners, few of whom were Muslim, dominated the armed forces. The military offers Christian members access to chaplains and Muslim members time to pray. Since many of the leaders of the 2002 attempted coup were Muslim northerners, Muslims in the military generally kept a low profile. During the reporting period, the military designated three Muslim military auxiliary chaplains: one for the gendarmerie, one for the police, and another for the navy.

The Government observes major Islamic and Christian religious holidays. The recognized Islamic holy days are Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha (Tabaski Day), Layla tul-Qadr (Night of Destiny), and Maulid al-Nabi (the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad). The recognized Christian holy days are Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Pentecost Monday, and All Saints' Day.

The law requires religious groups to register with the Government. In accordance with the 1960 law governing associations, all religious groups wishing to operate in the country must submit a file including the group's by-laws, names of the founding members, date of founding (or the date on which the founder received the revelation of his or her calling), general assembly minutes, the names of members of the ad-

ministrative board, and other information to the Ministry of Interior's Department of Faith-Based Organizations. The Ministry of Interior investigates through the police the backgrounds of the founding members to ensure that the group has no politically subversive members or purpose. No religious group complained of arbitrary registration procedures or problems with gaining Government recognition. The Ministry of Interior did not reject any registration requests during the reporting period. Traditional indigenous religious groups were less formally organized, and none applied for registration or recognition. The Government grants no tax or other benefits to religious groups; however, some religious groups gained favors through 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. The Government did not favor any particular religion consistently in this manner.

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

The Government recognizes and oversees all schools, regardless of religion. All schools must meet certain nationally established curriculum requirements. Schools operated by religious groups were free to teach and regulate their own religion courses.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools; established Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant student groups, including evangelical churches, usually offer this instruction outside of normal class hours.

Religious instruction in private schools varied. Some private schools included religious instruction in their curriculum, some allowed religious groups to teach religion during students' vacation breaks, and some did not allow any religious instruction. The Government subsidizes private secondary schools, including those run by Christian and Muslim groups, although arrears have been accumulating for several years. In August 2006 the Minister of Health announced that students attending Muslim schools, even those that have not been recognized by the Government, would have access to health care (inoculation campaigns, vitamin distribution, etc.) provided to students in Government schools. The Higher Council of Imams estimated that this new policy would benefit 96,000 students.

The Government began recognizing Muslim schools as official schools in 2006. During the reporting period, the Islamic National Council began constructing five new primary schools (two in Abidjan and three outside the Abidjan metro area) with the financial assistance of the Islamic Development Bank.

Unlike in previous reporting periods, the Government gave money to religious associations other than schools during the reporting period (about $20,000 or 10 million FCFA) to cover the cost of completing the construction of religious sites or to go on religious pilgrimages. 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, appeared at major religious celebrations and events organized by a wide variety of religious groups. The Government often invited leaders of various religious communities, including the Mediation Committee for National Reconciliation, the Forum of Religious Confessions, and the Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace, to attend official ceremonies and to sit on deliberative and advisory committees.

The Government continued to respond to the needs of various religious constituencies as a way of building political stability. In the past the Government paid for the construction of a Catholic cathedral. The Plateau Mosque in central Abidjan, a project started in 1994 under the direction of the Government, remained unfinished. In March 2007 the President met several times with Muslim leaders about completion of the Plateau Mosque, land disputes, and the 2007 pilgrimage to Mecca. At that meeting, President Gbagbo announced that he would give one million dollars (500 million FCFA) to finish the Plateau Mosque. The President ordered construction work on the esplanade of the mosque to be quickly completed, providing needed worship space before the whole project is completed; however, no work was finished by the end of this reporting period.

In May 2007 President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro met separately with a delegation of imams led by Sheikh Aboubacar Fofana, the Chairman of the Higher Council of Imams (COSIM). The delegation made several requests, but the Government took no action on the requests during the reporting period. The President also met with Christian groups. In March 2007 he met with a delegation from the United Methodist Church of Texas to discuss cooperation between Ivoirian and American Methodist churches. In March 2007 the President met with Catholic leaders to discuss the burglaries of 30 churches and seminaries. In response, the Presi-

dent dispatched security and defense forces to patrol churches in the most remote areas and promised to provide police protection for the property of other religious groups.

As with Muslim and Christian groups, President Gbagbo continued to meet frequently with traditional chiefs to listen to their concerns; however, such meetings were unsuccessful in bridging the deep political and ethnic divisions or promoting greater religious harmony.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Unlike in previous reporting periods, there were no reports that the Government monitored minority religious groups for what it considered to be subversive political activity.

Beginning with the 2001 Forum for National Reconciliation, the Government initiated several programs aimed at improving relations between the Government and religious groups. Because they were often perceived as being rebel sympathizers, many Muslims and Northerners felt they were targets of discrimination by Southerners and the President's party. The perception of discrimination amongst Muslims lessened with the creation of the power sharing Government of National Reconciliation in 2003, the appointment of Prime Minister Soro in March 2007, and appointment of Muslims to key Government positions including the prime ministry, high chancellorship, national assembly presidency, and various ministerial positions; however, these appointments did not end the social or political exclusion of certain groups.

Many northern Muslims continued to feel discriminated against when applying for identity certificates that document their citizenship and are required for voting. When applying for passports, northern citizens complained that Government officials required more documents from them than their southern, predominantly non-Muslim, counterparts. Additionally, there were reports that police officers continued to confiscate identity cards belonging to northern citizens or asked them to pay bribes at routine road checks before they would return the confiscated identity cards. More equitable issuance of identification certificates was a key demand in the peace process, and former Prime Minister Banny and current Prime Minister Soro made the implementation of a national identification process a top priority. However, this new process had barely begun by the end of the period covered by this report.

Some Muslim organizations view the Government's organizational requirements for Hajj trips to Saudi Arabia as unnecessary and unwarranted interference in religious affairs. For example, the Government required a minimum of 100 pilgrims per group, whereas the Saudi Government only requires 50 pilgrims per incoming group. The Government also required any group seeking to organize Hajj pilgrims to have been in existence for 3 to 4 years.

In December 2006 many Ivoirians were not able to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca because no plane was available. The Muslim community asked for the Government's assistance so that those who paid for the 2006 trip would be able to go in December 2007 without repaying and asked for a special Government office to be created that would be solely responsible for organizing the Hajj.

Members of the largely Christian and Muslim urban elite that heavily influence the state often relegated practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs to a lower social status than Christians and Muslims by excluding them from political decision-making. However, Government officials often invited traditional chiefs to participate in traditional libation ceremonies aimed at recognizing ancestors at the beginning of important ceremonies.

There were no reports on restrictions of religious freedom in the rebel-controlled northern 60 percent of the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Unlike in past reporting periods, there were no reports of mosques destroyed. In March 2006 officials from the district of Abidjan attempted to destroy a mosque built on public space in the area of Marcory, a mixed religious community, in order to allow a private citizen to build a supermarket.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Relations among the various religious groups became strained after the outbreak of the 2002 national crisis. Some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of traditional indigenous religions continued during the reporting period.

Government officials, acting on their own volition, often discriminated against Northerners by confiscating travel and identity documents at checkpoints. Many officials and other societal actors presumed that Northerners were Muslim and supported rebel activity in the north.

Some Christians and Muslims refused to associate with practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Many Christian and Muslim leaders disparaged practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs as "pagans" or practitioners of "black magic." Despite these hostile attitudes towards indigenous religious groups, many of their practitioners were unaware of or did not consider themselves victims of societal discrimination, nor did they complain about their treatment.

During the reporting period, some Catholic priests complained of hostility from the growing numbers of evangelical Christian ministers, who recruit many of their members from the Catholic Church.

A few interfaith activities were organized during the period covered by the report. In May 2007 Muslim and Catholic leaders delivered key speeches at a conference on peace and reconciliation organized by the Islamic International Foundation, an Ivoirian nongovernmental organization (NGO). During the last quarter of 2006, the Ivoirian Human Rights Movement (MIDH) organized a conference and a debate on the theme "Religion and Non-Violence" that featured an imam and an evangelical minister as speakers. In May 2006 delegates of the Forum of Religious Confessions of Cote d'Ivoire and of the Interfaith Council of West Africa (CIRAO) met in Abidjan at the behest of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, with participants from Ghana, Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and the United States. The theme of the meeting was peaceful coexistence between the religious groups. However, these interfaith initiatives have included few if any leaders of traditional indigenous religious groups.

The Forum of Religious Confessions (The Forum) is an interfaith organization that promotes dialogue, understanding, and improved relationships among religious leaders and groups, engaging 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 Forum collaborated regularly with the Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace, an organization created with the support of the Department of Religion within the Ministry of Interior and the American Cultural Center. The Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace includes all the religious groups in the country, including various evangelical churches that previously refused to join The Forum. Discussions were ongoing to combine the two organizations.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since the onset of the political crisis in 2002, the U.S. Embassy assisted efforts by the Government and NGOs to mitigate religious tensions in the country. The U.S. Ambassador and other U.S. Government officials regularly met with religious leaders.

On March 8, 2007, the Embassy hosted a conference to explore perceptions and realities of Muslim women and their place in Islam with 100 Muslim and Christian NGO activists and community leaders. Panelists discussed women's rights from a religious point of view and how traditional and secular customs are often intertwined with religious doctrine to reduce the status of women.

In February 2007 the Embassy hosted a roundtable on interfaith marriage with a mixed Muslim and Christian audience in Yamoussoukro. A Jewish-Catholic American couple shared their strategies for resolving issues of faith and family in a mixed-faith marriage.

Embassy officials met with a broad range of NGOs that work on religious freedom and tolerance issues throughout the reporting period.

DJIBOUTI

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however proselytizing was discouraged.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 8,450 square miles and a population of 700,000. More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. There are a small number of Roman Catholics, Protestants, Copts, and Baha'is, accounting for less than 1 percent of the population. There are no known practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Citizens officially are considered Muslims if they do not specifically identify with a faith; there are no figures available on the number of atheists in the country. Foreign-born Djiboutians are generally members of Roman Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, or Ethiopian Orthodox denominations.

A small number of 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 respected this right in practice; however, proselytizing is discouraged. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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. This court applies the Family Code, which includes elements of civil and Shari'a law, to rule on matters related to the family such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. These courts are applicable to Muslims only; non-Muslims are directed toward civil courts.

The Government requires that religious groups register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by submitting an application to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which, along with the Ministry of 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 members reported no incidents of discrimination but did not confirm whether the organization submitted a request for registration during the period covered by this report. In previous years, such requests have been refused.

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

The country observes the Muslim holy days of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the Islamic New Year, and the Ascension of the Prophet as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Family Court is not applicable to non-Muslims, the latter are brought to civil courts. 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. According to article 23 of the Family Code, "impediment to a marriage occurs when a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim."

The Ministry of Muslim Affairs monitors the activities of Muslims, but it does not restrict their religious practices. The Ministry has authority in all Islamic matters, including mosques, private religious schools (along with the Ministry of Education), religious events, as well as general Islamic guidelines of the state. The High Islamic Council, officially established within the Ministry in October 2004, is mandated to

give advice on all religious issues and concerns. It also is in charge of coordinating all Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the country.

The president is required to take a religious oath at inauguration; other Government employees are also required to do so, such as magistrates, the presidents of Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, Chamber of Accounts, and the inspector general of state. While there is no penalty established by law, it remains an official custom written in the Constitution for the president of the country and required by law for others. No legal provision exists for opposite practice.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches, as well as some NGOs, noted an increase in animosity towards non-Muslims in recent years. There were several reports of school children throwing rocks at churches.

Moderate Muslim clerics attribute the rise in Islamic fundamentalism in part to the international media, local Saudi Salafi/Wahhabi-inspired schools, and the growing number of graduates from Saudi Arabian and Yemeni Islamic schools abroad. The Government does not regulate foreign curriculum programs.

Churches differentiated between the Government's tolerant attitude toward them and what some worried was rising public animosity. Government officials were described as tolerant and respectful; however, the Government did not address the rise in public animosity towards Christians.

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

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

The Roman Catholic Church organizes an annual celebration with all the other Christian churches. The Minister of Islamic Affairs has received Ramadan greetings from the Pope. The Minister of Islamic Affairs meets with the heads of other faiths occasionally and at Government-organized ceremonies. There is no formal interfaith dialogue between the Government and religious groups, or between various religious groups themselves.

SECTION IV. U.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 periodically meet with leaders and members of religious communities and with U.S. NGOs with a missionary component to discuss common interest issues and promote tolerance. The Embassy has engaged several of its English Language Discussion Groups in discussions of religious freedom and tolerance. The Ambassador uses representational events to promote discussions on religious tolerance and understanding.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, religious leaders avoided criticizing the Government in their sermons, and Government officials sometimes monitored services.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,827 square miles and a population of 551,200. Christians account for approximately 93 percent of the population, and 5 percent of the population practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Roman Catholicism is the principal religion, dating to the Spanish colonial period when almost the entire population was baptized into the faith, and until recently membership in the church was the primary way to register a birth. Catholics comprise approximately 87 percent of the population, and an estimated 6 percent belong to Protestant and independent denominations. Many Catholics reportedly also follow traditional beliefs. Although in the past there was little organized Christian worship in remote rural areas, both Catholic and Protestant churches have expanded into interior regions, and new roads have made worship centers accessible in practically all areas. Muslims, members of the Baha'i Faith, practitioners of other religious beliefs, and atheists each comprise less than 1 percent of the population. The number of Muslims is increasing probably due to the growing number of West African and Middle Eastern immigrants attracted by the country's oil wealth.

Foreign missionaries operate both on Bioko Island and the mainland.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 from holding retreats and other meetings. Door-to-door evangelism reportedly occurred without incident.

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

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

The application and approval process may take several years, but such delay appears to be the result of bureaucratic inefficiency and not of policy designed to impede any religious group. Groups that provide beneficial social programs, such as health projects or schools, reportedly are approved more quickly. Enforcement of registration requirements is inconsistent. Unregistered groups which operate can be fined. Such fines are rarely applied, but the Government periodically announced over the radio that any unregistered church was subject to fines or closure and should register as soon as possible.

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

Foreign missionaries worked throughout the country, generally without impediment.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government and President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo's ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) reacted defensively to any criticism by the clergy. The Government continued unofficially to restrict freedom of expression of the clergy by emphasizing that the role of religion is spiritual, not

political. Permission was granted for a new radio station to operate and broadcast religious programming, but for unknown reasons this did not occur during the period covered by this report.

Government agents, including the President, occasionally make official and unofficial visits to observe church services, request a timetable of church activities, or participate. The Government requires permission for any religious or faith-based social assistance activity outside the confines of places of worship.

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

The fundamental law on religion states that each person is free to study his or her religion and should not be forced to study another faith. Children of all religious groups are allowed to enroll in schools where Catholicism is taught; however, they are expected to participate in daily Catholic religious lessons and prayers. In practice, for non-Catholics, access to study in one's own faith in these schools generally is not possible. Some Protestant denominations have their own schools and are allowed to operate freely.

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

As part of a national strategy to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, a 2007 presidential decree restricted traditional healers from offering treatments for the disease. (Officials directed those who tested positive for HIV/AIDS to free treatment from Government hospitals.)

There were no confirmed reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country. The Archbishop of Canterbury protested the continuing imprisonment of Protestant Reverend Bienvenido Samba Momesori, who has been held without charge in Evinayong prison since 2003. It is believed that the detention was politically motivated, and there was no indication that it was due to religious oppression.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. However, some non-Catholic religious groups reported that they continued to fear license rescission and tried to avoid any reference to Government or political affairs in church activities. In practice, the Government has not closed down any places of worship in the last few 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. Embassy in Malabo reopened in late 2003, and in 2006 a resident Ambassador was appointed and credentials accepted.

ERITREA

The Government severely restricts freedom of religion for groups that it has not registered and infringes upon the independence of some registered groups. The 1997 Constitution provides for religious freedom; however, the Constitution has not been implemented. Following a 2002 Government decree that religious groups must register, the Government closed all religious facilities not belonging to the country's four principal religious groups—the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church. The membership of these four religious groups comprises a significant majority of the population.

During the reporting period, the Government's record on religious freedom further deteriorated. The Government continued to harass, arrest, and detain members of independent evangelical groups, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church and sought greater control over the four approved religious groups. The Government continued its intervention in proce-

dural and administrative decisions of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Government failed to register any of the four religious groups who applied in 2002 for registration, and it restricted religious meetings and arrested individuals during religious ceremonies, gatherings, and prayer meetings. There were also reports of forced recantations. There were reports of torture of religious detainees during the reporting period, and some religious detainees were held in harsh conditions that included extreme temperature fluctuations with limited or no access to family.

Citizens generally were tolerant of one another in the practice of their religion, with the exception of societal attitudes toward Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostal groups. The Government requires citizens to perform national service in the military or face incarceration, but it had no programs for alternative national service that would permit Jehovah's Witnesses and others whose faith precludes military service to satisfy the requirement. Some individuals who viewed failure to perform military service as a sign of disloyalty encouraged harassment of these religious groups and reported their activities to the Government.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Government routinely dismissed U.S. Government concerns, citing the absence of conflict between Christians and Muslims within the country and its concerns about disruptive practices of some religious groups that it feared would disrupt the country's "social harmony." In November 2006 the U.S. Secretary of State again designated Eritrea as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 48,489 square miles and a population of 3.6 million. Although reliable statistics are not available, it is estimated that 50 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim and 30 percent is Orthodox Christian. Approximately 13 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, while groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Protestants, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhist, Hindus, and Baha'is. Approximately 2 percent of the population practice traditional indigenous religions. The population in the eastern and western lowlands is predominantly Muslim and predominantly Christian in the highlands. There are very few atheists. Religious participation is high among all ethnic groups

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

Foreign missionaries operate with some restrictions. Some missionaries and representatives of the restricted unregistered religious groups are present but keep an extremely low profile for fear of abuse of their congregations.

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 had not implemented the Constitution by the end of the reporting period. The Government severely restricted this right in the case of numerous small Protestant churches, the Baha'is, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Government officially recognizes only four religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Islam, and the Roman Catholic Church. Other religious groups must register with the Government before they are permitted to conduct religious activities and services. The Government does not require the four official religious groups to register and has refused to register other religious groups. In 2002, Meherte Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Faith Mission Church, and the Baha'i fully complied

with registration requirements; however, to date they have not been registered by the Government.

Several other religious groups have complied partially with the registration requirements, and some have chosen not to submit any documentation. Registration requirements include a description of the history of the religious group in the country, an explanation of the "uniqueness" or benefit that the group offers compared with other religious groups already present, names and personal information of religious leaders, detailed information on assets and property owned by the group, and sources of funding from abroad. A Government committee reviews the applications, which in theory are to be approved only if they conform to local culture.

The Government approved no registrations during the period covered by this report, despite repeated inquiries.

The Government requested that the four officially recognized religious groups provide an accounting of their financial sources, as well as lists of personnel and real property, and the religious groups have reportedly complied. The Government continued its involvement in the affairs of the four official religious groups and required them to provide a list of religious leaders and clergy so they can be enrolled in military/national service.

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

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

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

Education is predominantly secular.

The Government made no effort to promote interfaith understanding or to coordinate interfaith dialogue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Islam and Christianity, as practiced by the four official religious groups, are practiced widely and are for the most part tolerated, with persons allowed to worship freely. Following the 2002 Government decree that certain religious groups must register or cease all religious activities, religious facilities not belonging to the four officially recognized religious groups were forced to close. Authorities in the Office of Religious Affairs told religious groups that home prayer meetings would be permitted, but the Government does not fully respect this guidance. They were also informed that a standing law would be used to prevent unregistered religious groups from holding political or other gatherings in private homes of more than three to five persons. In practice, authorities enforced this law.

Authorities harassed members of the four groups that applied for registration in 2002—the Meherte Yesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Faith Mission Church, and the Baha'is. Although the Government has sometimes allowed them to hold home prayer meetings, private study meetings, and for one group, private Sunday worship services in their church, security officials have nonetheless also arrested individuals for participating in such activities. Like other unregistered groups, their houses of worship remained closed and they were not permitted to meet in public settings. Religious groups such as the Kale Hiwot (Baptists), Full Gospel Church, and Meserete Kristos (Mennonite) Church complied with some, but not all, of the registration requirements. Treatment of these and other unregistered religious groups often varied by locale. Some local authorities allowed unregistered groups to worship in homes or rented spaces, whereas others did not allow them to meet at all.

The Government closely monitored the activities and movements of unregistered religious groups and members, including nonreligious social functions attended by members. In 2004 the Government also closed down an Orthodox congregation known as Medhane Alem. The Government continued to arrest, harass and threaten members of Medhane Alem, including arresting eight more members in January 2007.

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

All religious entities must receive authorization from the Office of Religious Affairs to print and distribute documents. The Office of Religious Affairs routinely approved requests for authorization from registered groups and four unregistered churches; however, in the past other unregistered churches were unable to obtain authorization to print documents for distribution within their congregations.

Faith-based organizations are permitted to fund, but not to initiate or implement, development projects. Several religious groups 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 were free to worship at nearby houses of worship for the four registered religions. Military members reportedly were sometimes allowed to possess certain religious books to pray privately although not in groups. This rule is inconsistently enforced. Several members of unregistered religious groups reportedly were detained for violating this rule in the summer of 2006, and there were reports that while Muslims were able to have the Qur'an, Bibles were confiscated from Christian members of the military.

The Government forbids what it deems to be radical forms of Islam.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, there were reliable reports that authorities detained at least 160 members of unregistered religious groups without charges. Some were released after detentions of several days or less, while others spent longer periods in confinement without charges and without access to legal counsel. Government restrictions made it difficult to determine the precise number of religious prisoners at any one time, and releases sometimes went unreported; however, the number of long-term prisoners continued to grow. Some nongovernmental organizations reported as many as 1,900 prisoners of conscience in detention.

The Government reportedly held individuals who were jailed for their religious affiliation at various locations, including facilities administered by the military, such as at Mai Serwa outside the capital and the more distant Sawa and Gelalo as well as police stations inside Asmara and other cities. Often, detainees were not formally charged, accorded due process, or allowed access to their families. While many were ostensibly jailed for evasion of military conscription, significant numbers were being held solely for their religious beliefs, and some were held in harsh conditions that included extreme temperature fluctuations. There were reports of torture. Many were required to recant their religious beliefs as a precondition of release.

The Government did not excuse individuals who objected to military conscription for religious reasons or reasons of conscience, nor did it provide for alternative national service. Based on their religious beliefs, most members of Jehovah's Witnesses refused to participate in national military service or to vote. Some Muslims objected to universal national service because of the requirement that Muslim women must perform military duty. Some members within the Catholic leadership also objected to priests and seminarians having to do military service, viewing such activities as violations of their vows.

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

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

Arrests of individuals, ostensibly for noncompliance with national service requirements yet apparently targeting certain religious groups, continued throughout the reporting period. Individuals arrested were often detained for extended periods of time without due process. On occasion, charges were levied; however, generally individuals were held without charges.

Of the 450 individuals reported as detained during the previous reporting period, more than 300 remained incarcerated. Many of them were held in military prisons for not having performed required national military service, and most belonged to unregistered religious groups. Several pastors and dozens of women were among the imprisoned. Many refused to recant their faith and continued to be detained in civilian and military detention facilities across the country. Several were released after recanting their faith.

The Government singled out Jehovah's Witnesses for particularly harsh treatment. According to credible sources, a total of 25 Jehovah's Witnesses were being held without charges or trial. Thirteen were being detained at Sawa, eight for allegedly failing to perform national military service. Detainees above the cut-off age for national service eligibility (48 for men and 27 for women) were reportedly held for attending religious meetings, preaching, or visiting families of escapees.

Jehovah's Witnesses were jailed in harsh conditions for varying periods; at least three individuals were detained for more than 12 years, reportedly for evading compulsory military service. However, the maximum legal penalty for refusing to perform national service is 2 years. In the past, Ministry of Justice officials have denied that any Jehovah's Witnesses were in detention without charge, although they acknowledged that some of them and a number of Muslims were jailed for evading national service.

There were reports that the security forces tortured those detained for their religious beliefs. In October 2006, there were credible reports that two members of an unregistered church died from injuries after being severely beaten and tortured. In February 2007, there were credible reports another member of an unregistered religious group died after enduring torture and illness. There were reports throughout the reporting period that individuals held in detention were beaten and tortured.

During the reporting period, the Government released a prominent Evangelical singer for medical treatment for injuries sustained from torture during detention.

There were credible reports that some detainees were required to sign statements as a condition of release renouncing or agreeing not to practice their faith or, in a small number of cases, to "return to the faith of their fathers," which some detainees understood to mean becoming a member of the Orthodox Church. In some cases in which detainees refused to sign such documents, relatives were asked to convince them to do so. In some cases authorities demanded letters from priests of the Orthodox Church confirming that the individuals returned to the Orthodox Church.

At the end of the period covered by this report, 28 leaders and pastors of the unregistered Pentecostal churches had been detained for more than 3 years without due process.

In April 2007 nearly 80 members of an unregistered religious group were arrested in Asmara while attending a worship service despite having received authorization from the Office of Religious Affairs for the service to be held. In February 2007, police arrested 10 members of an unregistered church at a party following a wedding.

In January 2007 police arrested eight members of the Medhane Alem congregation of the Orthodox Christian Church. The eight individuals were employees of various Government ministries and were arrested while at work. There were reports that they were interrogated by police and asked to name other members of the congregation.

In Assab police arrested 25 members of unregistered churches. All 25 were reportedly being detained at the Wi'a Military Camp.

At the Sawa Military School, school authorities conducted a check on the student conscripts and seized more than 100 Bibles. After burning the Bibles, authorities subjected the students to severe punishment.

In Asmara the pastor of one of the unregistered churches was arrested in January 2007. He remained in detention at the end of the reporting period.

During the second week of November 2006, the Government orchestrated a large-scale campaign to arrest members of unregistered religious groups in Mendefera, in the heart of the predominately Christian central highlands. Initial reports claimed that the Government arrested more than 150 Protestant Christians from the Church of Living God, Kaile Hiwot, and other churches.

In October 2006 police arrested 12 members of an unregistered church at a private home in Asmara. Two of the individuals reportedly died shortly after the arrests after being tortured and severely beaten. During October the Government also incarcerated two members of a different unregistered church.

In September 2006 the Government ordered the departure of a foreigner who was an active member in the Evangelical Episcopalian Church and in the small school run by the Church.

In August 2006 police arrested 29 members of unregistered churches during raids on home prayer meetings in Asmara, Keren and Massawa.

In May 2006 50 evangelical Christian students enrolled and boarding at Mai Nefhiy Educational Institution were arrested and subjected to severe punishment by authorities, ostensibly for refusing to participate in events surrounding Eritrean Liberation Day. At the end of the reporting period, they were detained at Sawa. In August 2006 some students were released from detention, but only after they signed documents recanting their faith. The released students were prevented from registering for school. The other students remain incarcerated.

There were reports that authorities detained three members of an unregistered church in Nefasit. One church member, who had been forced to leave behind an extremely sick child who later died, was released on bail.

In spring 2006 the BBC reported that a British missionary was detained for several days, and subsequently expelled, for distributing Bibles. In February 2006, a canon of the Evangelical Episcopalian Church, who was on a temporary visit from the United Kingdom, was ordered to leave.

While participating in short-term retraining at the Sawa military training facility, 75 Christians were detained and punished for reading the Bible. They refused to recant at least three times and continued to be held at Sawa.

In January 2006 a member of one of the unregistered churches was arrested and detained in Asmara. Several weeks later his wife was also detained in a separate facility. Both reportedly were still being held at the end of the reporting period.

Over the Christmas 2005 holiday, 78 individuals were detained after raids on businesses owned by evangelical Christians, Pentecostals, and other members of unregistered churches. Two individuals were released after paying a bail of $10,000 (150,000 nakfa) and signing pledges not to practice their faith. During the raid, several church members managed to escape and depart the country or go into hiding. Authorities threatened their family members who remained in the country with arrest and detention if they did not turn in those who had escaped or gone into hiding. More than 50 of those detained remained in custody.

In October 2005, the Government ordered the long-time pastor of the Evangelical Episcopalian church to depart the country.

During September 2005, there were reports of the arrest of more than 200 evangelical Christians and members of unregistered churches, including 20 members of the Hallelujah and Philadelphia churches, for organizing a wedding party in Asmara. While the members of the Hallelujah and Philadelphia churches were reportedly released 1 month later, more than 75 were subjected to further detention and were being held at Sawa.

In August 2005 police arrested a bridal couple and 18 wedding guests from an unregistered church during the private wedding ceremony in the bride's home. The bridal couple was released on bail and the 18 guests remained in detention.

In Asmara the pastor of one of the unregistered churches was arrested. He remained in detention.

Throughout the reporting period there were unconfirmed reports that nearly 100 Muslims were arrested and detained. There were reports that 70 Muslims, who oppose the mufti appointed by the Government more than 10 years ago, continued to be detained as they refused to honor his presence.

The Government continued to maintain a high degree of control over the operations of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, highlighting concerns regarding the independence and freedom of religious practice permitted within the Church by the Government. In August 2005, the Government appointed a lay administrator to manage and oversee church operations, in contravention to the Orthodox Church Constitution. Shortly after this appointment, the Holy Synod voted to remove church Patriarch Abune Antonios on putative charges that he had committed heresy and was no longer following church doctrine. A new patriarch, Abune Dioscoros, was selected by the synod. The deposed patriarch continued to be able to serve as a priest; however, he was forbidden to conduct church services. In January 2006, the deposed patriarch objected to his removal through a letter sent, and made public, to the Holy Synod. In the letter he denied the charges against him and excommunicated several synod members, as well as the lay administrator, stating that their actions, and those of the Government, violated the Constitution and bylaws of the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

Abune Antonios remained essentially under house arrest and was not seen. In January 2007 there were credible reports that Government officials raided his home and removed all of his patriarchal vestments and personal religious items. According to church officials, Dioscoros was the new patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and he was officially voted in as the patriarch in April 2007.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were reports that police forced some adherents of unregistered religious groups to sign statements to abandon their faiths and join the Orthodox Christian Church as a precondition of their release.

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSE AND DISCRIMINATION

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

Jehovah's Witnesses generally were disliked and faced some societal discrimination because of their refusal to participate in the 1993 independence referendum and to perform national military service, a position that was widely judged as unpatriotic. There was also some social prejudice against other unregistered religious groups. Some persons reportedly cooperated with Government authorities by reporting on and harassing members of those groups.

Few religious leaders in the country took a strong public stance in defense of freedom of conscience for all faiths out of fear of being arrested.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Despite repeated attempts, U.S. Embassy officials were not permitted by the Government to meet with religious leaders.

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

In September 2004 the U.S. 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 Secretary renewed the designation the following year and applied sanctions under the Arms Export Control Act that prohibited the commercial sale of certain defense articles and services.

ETHIOPIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Some Protestant and Muslim groups continued to complain that local officials discriminated against them when seeking land for churches, mosques, and cemeteries, but there was no infringement on religious practice.

Tensions between Muslim and Christian communities resulted in localized violent episodes on several occasions. Additionally, there was reported tension between the traditional Sufi Muslim majority and Salafi/Wahhabi Muslims who derived support from foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 472,000 square miles, and a population of 77 million. An estimated 40 to 45 percent of the population belongs to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), which is predominant in the northern regions of Tigray and Amhara.

Approximately 45 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Islam is most prevalent in the eastern Somali and Afar Regions, as well as in many parts of Oromiya.

Christian evangelical and Pentecostal groups continue to be the fastest growing groups and constitute an estimated 10 percent of the population. Established Protestant churches such as Mekane Yesus and the Kale Hiwot are strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPR); western and central Oromiya; and in urban areas. In Gambella Region, Mekane Yesus followers represent 60 percent of the population. The Evangelical Church Fellowship claims 23 denominations under its religious umbrella throughout the country.

Oriental Rite and Latin Rite Roman Catholics number more than 500,000. There are reportedly more than 7,500 Jehovah's Witnesses adherents and 105 Kingdom

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

A large number of foreign missionary groups operate in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, on occasion local government authorities infringed on this right. The Government sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors; however, some local administrators were implicated in several religious clashes.

The Constitution requires the separation of state and religion and prohibits a state religion, and the Government generally respected these provisions in practice.

The Government requires registration of religious groups. Religious institutions and churches, like NGOs, must renew their registration with the Ministry of Justice every 3 years. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) stated that this registration requirement reflects a lack of progress or improvement in the Government's treatment of "newer religions," specifically Protestant churches. Mekane Yesus, the Evangelical Fellowship, and the Catholic Church believed that churches should be placed in a "different status than NGOs."

The EOC never registered with the Government and has never faced repercussions. The Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), after registering 10 years ago, never re-registered. Protests from other religious groups over these exceptions did not result in equal treatment from the Government. The Apostolic Nuncio in the country wrote repeatedly to the Prime Minister's Office seeking equal treatment before the law. However, there was no change in the Government policy during the period covered by this report.

Under the law, any religious organization that undertakes development activities must register its development wing separately as an NGO with the Ministry of Justice. To register, each religious organization must complete an application form and submit a copy of its bylaws, curriculum vitae of the organization's leader, and a copy of the leader's identity card. A group's failure to register results in a denial of legal standing, which prevents it from opening a bank account or fully participating in any court proceeding.

Religious groups, like private individuals or businesses, must apply to regional and local governments for land allocation. Religious groups are given use of Government land for churches, schools, hospitals, and cemeteries free of charge; however, religious schools and hospitals, regardless of length of operation, are subject to Government closure and land forfeiture at any time. An interfaith effort to promote revision of the law for religious organizations to obtain duty-free status continued.

In most interreligious disputes, the Government maintained neutrality and tried to be an impartial arbitrator. Some religious leaders requested the establishment of a Federal institution to deal with religious groups; however, no action was taken to establish such a Federal institution by the end of the period covered by this report.

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

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

The Government, through the Ministry of Justice and regional state authorities, continued to support the Interfaith Peace-Building Initiative, an NGO dedicated to promoting interfaith consultation and cooperation and ending religiously motivated violence. The Initiative's members include representatives of the Ethiopia's major religious institutions: the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church-Mekane Yesus, and the Baha'i Center.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government bans the formation of political parties based on religion. There were no religious political parties in the country, and the ban was not tested in practice.

The Government did not issue work visas to foreign religious workers unless they were associated with the development wing of a religious organization licensed by the Government. However, this policy was not consistently enforced for Muslims or Orthodox Christians. 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, Wakafeta, for unspecified reasons.

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. The EHRCO reported that no journalists were detained or charged during the reporting period with inciting religious groups or with defamation of religious leaders.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reported incidents relating to wearing conservative Islamic attire.

Minority religious groups complained of discrimination in the allocation of Government land for religious sites. Protestants reported inequities in treatment and access by local officials when seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders felt that as perceived "newcomers," they remained disadvantaged in the allocation of land compared with the EOC and the EIASC. The EIASC complained that it had more difficulty than the EOC obtaining land from the Government, while others believed that the EIASC was favored for mosque locations.

Local authorities in the northern town of Axum, a holy city for the EOC, continued to deny Muslim leaders' repeated requests to allocate land for the construction of a mosque, even though the Constitution provides for freedom to establish institutions of religious education and administration. Tigray and Amhara regional government officials chose not to interpret this provision liberally in the towns of Axum and Lalibela respectively, and the Federal Government did not overrule them. Muslims have had access to land since the country became a republic in 1995.

Following the numerous religious conflicts in late 2006 in the western part of the country, the Federal and regional governments significantly increased the presence of government security forces. Additionally, the Government replaced or transferred many local government leaders in the areas where the violence occurred, due to reports that some leaders had failed to prevent an escalation in local religious tensions. As a result, tensions had subsided at the end of the reporting period.

Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses continued to lease their own plots of land in the capital and throughout the country, due to lack of suitable properties available from the Government. However, in Oromiya some plots were provided free of charge to some religious groups to build places of worship.

The EIASC also raised concerns about the equitable celebration of religious holidays in the country, noting Orthodox Christian holidays such as Meskel and Epiphany are celebrated in Meskel Square and Jan Meda, two large public squares in Addis Ababa, while the celebration of Eid al-Fitr had been relegated to the less prominent Addis Ababa stadium. The EIASC's request to the Addis Ababa City Council for land to build a venue for this celebration was still pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Meserte Kristos/Mennonite Church, Mekane Yesus Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the EIASC made no progress in securing the return of property confiscated by the Government under the Derg regime. The Seventh-day Adventists sought the return of two hospitals, among other property. The EIASC continued to try to obtain properties outside the capital that were similarly confiscated. In Addis Ababa and Oromiya, structures have been returned under Federal provisions; however, edifices under regional statutes have yet to be returned. The Mekane Yesus and EIASC have reclaimed some property in the past.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In July 2006 in Addis Ababa, police clashed with Muslims protesting the demolition of a mosque being built without the necessary zoning permits. To remedy the situation, the Addis Ababa City Administration subsequently provided properly zoned land to the Addis Ababa Islamic Council to build a new mosque.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were reports of forced religious conversion, but not of U.S. minors who had 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 September and October 2006, several hundred Christians were forced to denounce Christianity and accept Islam following religious conflicts in Dembi and Beshesha. The majority of those coerced into Islam converted back to Christianity after the upheaval.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

Following a series of interreligious conflicts in the western part of the country between Muslim and Orthodox Christian religious groups, the Federal and regional governments significantly increased the presence of Government security forces. Additionally, the Government replaced or transferred many local government leaders in the areas where the violence occurred, due to reports that some leaders had failed to prevent an escalation in local religious tensions. As a result, tensions had subsided at the end of the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were several reports of low-level physical and verbal harassment targeted at religious officials and church members that led victims to seek protection from the local authorities. Ethiopian Orthodox leaders reported that Protestants sometimes failed to respect Orthodox holy days and customs. Muslims reported that some Pentecostal preachers disparaged Islam in their services. Some Muslim and Protestant leaders complained that the EOC's desire to show its dominance caused irritation in the religious community.

The EIASC continued to express concern over increasing external Wahhabi influence within the Muslim community. The EIASC alleged that money flowed into the country through Saudi-funded entities and NGOs, raising concern over external non-Ethiopian Islamic influences.

In most regions, Orthodox Christians and Muslims generally respected each other's religious observances, and there was tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas. Most urban areas reflected a mixture of all religious groups. However, during the reporting period, a series of violent interfaith conflicts in the western part of the country threatened historic tolerance and stability.

On April 2, 2007, in Bambasse, a town in southwest Ethiopia, local Muslims raided the house of evangelist Tolosa Megersa, resulting in the death of six of his cattle and sheep. Five days later, the home of Full Gospel Church leader Lemmu Abdissa was raided. All his property was destroyed, including 8,815 pounds of grain.

On March 26, 2007, a group of Muslim youth attacked and killed evangelist Taddese Tefera Akufo, in Jima, Oromiya Region. At the time of the report, no suspects were in police detention.

In February 2007 the Federal High Court in Jima sentenced six of the perpetrators of an October 15, 2006, massacre in Beshesha to death and sentenced over 100 others to prison terms ranging from 1 year to life imprisonment. Hundreds of Muslims stormed an Ethiopian Orthodox church during a religious celebration. The attackers set the church on fire and attacked churchgoers as they fled, also forcing many to immediately denounce Christianity and adopt Islam. The clash resulted in four deaths and dozens of injuries. Amateur video taken of the aftermath of the event, including footage of victims killed by machete, was distributed throughout the country. While other factors may have exacerbated tensions, this incident was the most violent attack on Orthodox Church members in recent history.

In December 2006 a joint statement issued by the heads of the EOC, EIASC, Evangelist, and Catholic churches called on followers to work together towards peace and reconciliation. The Government encouraged secular and faith-based organizations to find a lasting solution to their conflicts. These organizations, in collaboration with Federal and newly installed local government officials, have taken the initiative to formulate frameworks for healthy dialogue aimed at reconciliation.

On October 18, 2006, in Begi and Gidami, Oromiya Region, clashes between Muslims and Protestants resulted in 9 deaths, including the death of two Protestant preachers, whose throats were slashed, and over 100 injured. Additionally, 21

churches, 1 mosque, and dozens of houses were burned, leading to the displacement of over 400 people. Orthodox churches were burned, but the incidents were primarily between Protestants and Muslims.

On September 26, 2006, in several parts of western Ethiopia, a series of clashes occurred between the Muslim community, the EOC community, and members of the Protestant or Evangelical communities. The conflict began as a result of smoke from an EOC religious celebration entering a nearby mosque in Dembi, Oromiya Region. This escalated into a violent conflict that resulted in the deaths of six Christians and four Muslims. Additionally, four EOC churches and many houses were burned, displacing hundreds of local residents.

In response to the violent clashes between Muslim and Orthodox religious groups in late 2006 in the western part of the country that were referenced in Section II, Restrictions on Religious Freedom, the Federal and regional governments significantly increased the presence of Government security forces. Additionally, the Government replaced or transferred many local Government leaders in the areas where the violence occurred, due to reports that some leaders had failed to prevent an escalation in local religious tensions. As a result, tensions had subsided 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.

On April 16, 2007, the Embassy sponsored the Overseas Speaker Program in which 8 members of the Ethiopian Muslim Diaspora delegation spoke to over 100 secondary school students and faculty of Awelia Muslim Missionary School on the importance of religious tolerance. The delegation included four American citizens and residents of Sweden, Canada, Germany and Saudi Arabia. The Embassy also sponsored a visit from an American imam, who met with members of local Muslim Youth Councils and other community representatives to discuss religious tolerance and freedom with local Muslims.

GABON

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 103,347 square miles and a population of 1,454,900. Major religious beliefs practiced in the country include Christianity (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism), Islam, and traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Many persons practice elements of both Christianity and traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Approximately 73 percent of the population, including noncitizens, practice at least some elements of Christianity; 12 percent practice Islam (of whom 80 to 90 percent are foreigners); 10 percent practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs exclusively; and 5 percent practice no religion or are atheists. The President is a member of the Muslim minority.

Foreign missionaries 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 respected this right in practice. A 1970 decree banning Jehovah's Witnesses remained in effect; however, the Government did not enforce the ban.

The Ministry of the Interior maintains an official registry of some religious groups; however, it does not appear to grant registration to all small, indigenous religious groups. The Government does not require religious groups to register but rec-

ommends 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. These schools must 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 major religious groups. Such meetings are rare, but informal discussions among religious leaders are routine.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government refused to register some small, indigenous traditional groups (approximately nine in total). These groups have continued their beliefs and practices unregistered. The refusals may have been part of an ongoing effort to prevent secular, particularly non-Gabonese, groups, posing as religious entities, from registering to receive residency status and other benefits under false pretenses. There were no new reported rejections during this reporting period. 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 and to proselytize, despite their official prohibition.

While the Government television stations accorded free transmission time to the Catholic Church, some Protestant congregations and Islamic mosques alleged in the past that the stations do not accord free airtime to minority religious groups.

In the past missionaries expressed concern about extra visa requirements.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Practitioners of some traditional indigenous religious beliefs inflicted bodily harm on other persons during the period covered by the report. On April 8, 2007, a 3-year-old boy was murdered in what was widely viewed as a ritual killing. Neighbors attacked and killed two of the alleged murderers, and two others were arrested. The Council of Ministers expressed its indignation and outrage at the heinous crime. The body of Mathieu Moundounga, bearing signs of a ritual killing, was found on December 15, 2006. No information was made public on the investigation into this crime or concerning investigations of ritual killings that occurred during previous reporting 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. U.S. Embassy officials met regularly with leaders of the Catholic Church, the Islamic Superior Council, and Protestant churches. The Embassy maintained contact with the Ministry of Interior and the Minister of Human Rights to discuss the general state of religion in the country. On February 2, 2007, the Embassy funded a 1-day conference on ritual crimes that attracted national and international media attention.

THE GAMBIA

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

There was one report of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; most prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 4,361 square miles and a population of 1,641,600. Sunni Muslims constitute more than 90 percent of the population. The vast majority are Malikite Sufis, of which the main orders represented are Tijaniyah, Qadiriyah, Muridiyah, and Ahmadiyya. Except for the Ahmadiyya, Sufi orders pray together at common mosques. A small percentage of Muslims, predominantly immigrants from South Asia, do not ascribe to any traditional Islamic school of thought.

An estimated 9 percent of the population is Christian, and less than 1 percent practice indigenous animist religious beliefs. The Christian community, situated mostly in the west and south of the country, is predominantly Roman Catholic; there are also several Protestant groups including Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and various small evangelical denominations. There is a small group of followers of the Baha'i Faith and a small community of Hindus among South Asian immigrants.

Intermarriage between Muslims and Christians is common. In some areas, Islam and Christianity are 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 sit in Banjul and Kanifing. Their jurisdiction applies only to matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance that involve Muslims. The Cadi courts apply classic Maliki fiqh (Islamic law).

The Government considers the following religious holy days to be national holidays: Tobaski (Eid al-Adha), Yaomul Ashura (the Islamic New Year), Maulid al-Nabi (the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad), Koriteh (Eid al-Fitr), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, and Christmas Day.

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

The Government permits and does not limit religious instruction in schools. Both public and private schools throughout the country provide Biblical and Qur'anic studies without Government restriction or interference. The Government funds religious instruction in public schools but this instruction is not mandatory.

Government meetings and events typically commence with two prayers, one Islamic and one Christian. The Government often invites senior officials of both religious groups to open major Government events.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There was one report of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Most prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

In April 2007 a group of Muslim worshippers in Brikama allegedly tried to attack a Catholic priest. The incident, which may have been led by a police officer, took place when Muslims conducting afternoon prayers at the police station mosque were disturbed by noise from the nearby Catholic Church. There were conflicting accounts about what precipitated the attack: the noise or the priest's Nigerian nationality. In addition, some reports said the priest injured himself while barricading his office against the group, while other reports said the group beat the priest. Accounts also conflicted widely about the role the presiding imam played in either instigating or attempting to prevent the attack.

The Government swiftly took action on the incident and an investigation was pending at the end of the reporting period. The Christian Council and the Supreme Islamic Council conducted reconciliation efforts and reinforced their messages of religious harmony and tolerance.

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

The Inter-Faith Group for Dialogue and Peace, comprising representatives of the Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i communities, met to discuss matters of mutual concern such as religious freedom, tolerance, and the need for people of different religious groups to live together in harmony. The chairman of the group was reportedly conducting his own investigation of the April incident in Brikama but made no statement by the end of the reporting period.

Practitioners of female circumcision in the country believed that Islam mandates the practice and its surrounding rites. However, in May 2007, 18 female circumcisers agreed to abandon the practice in a highly publicized ceremony attended by the Health Minister as part of an NGO-led campaign against female genital mutilation (FGM). Although the Government's official stance was that female circumcision is a cultural issue that the Government cannot forbid, Government programs to promote girls' education and development quietly worked to reduce the prevalence of FGM by changing societal attitudes. In addition, the Children's Bill, aimed at curbing violence against children, outlaws "social and cultural practices that affect the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular, those customs and practices that are (1) prejudicial to the health and life of the child and; (2) discriminatory to the child on the grounds of sex or other status."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also met with religious leaders of several denominations at Embassy functions, including iftar dinners, where the Embassy promoted religious freedom as a specific objective.

GHANA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, tensions sometimes arose between different branches of the same religious group, as well as between Christian and traditional indigenous religious groups. A number of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) promoted interfaith and intrafaith understanding.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 238,538 square miles and a population of approximately 22 million. According to the 2000 Government census, approximately 69 percent of the population is Christian, 16 percent is Muslim, and 15 percent adheres

to traditional indigenous religious beliefs or other religious groups. The Muslim community has protested these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is closer to 30 percent. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are reported to be the fastest growing denominations in Ghana. Approximately 6 percent of the population does not affiliate itself with a particular religion.

Other religious groups include the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Ninchiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckankar, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, and Rastafarianism. There are also some separatist or spiritual churches that include elements of Christianity and traditional indigenous beliefs such as magic and divination. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam. No statistics are available for the percentage of atheists.

There is some degree of overlap in religious practices as traditional indigenous religious beliefs are combined with elements of Christianity and Islam. Many Catholics and Protestants also attend Pentecostal or charismatic church services.

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

Afrikania (also known as the Afrikan Renaissance Mission), a group that supports traditional indigenous religious practices, often criticizes the Government, foreign diplomatic missions, and NGOs, contending that they corrupt traditional values and impose foreign religious beliefs. Afrikania leaders claimed the movement had more than four million followers; however, no independent confirmation of the claim was available.

Four Islamic traditions are present in the country: Tijanis (a Sufi sect found in West Africa), Salafi/Wahhabi-oriented Ahlussuna (made up of the Ahlussuna Wal-Jam-A and the less conservative Ahlussuna Majilis), Ahmadis, and a small number of Shi'a.

There is not a significant link between ethnicity and religion; however, geography is often associated with religious identity. The majority of the Muslim population resides in northern areas as well as in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, while the majority of the followers of traditional indigenous religious beliefs reside in rural areas. Christians live throughout the country.

Foreign missionaries operate freely in the country. In addition to proselytizing, missionaries are active in health, education, skills/vocational training, and social activities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Government employees, including the president, are required to swear an oath upon taking office; however, this oath can be either religious or secular, depending on the preference of the individual. The Government recognizes Christian, Islamic, and secular holidays.

There is no Government body that regulates or oversees religious affairs as all religious bodies are independent institutions; however, religious institutions must register with the Registrar General's Department to receive formal Government recognition. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General is the same for an NGO. There were no reports that the Government denied registration to any group. Most traditional indigenous religious groups, with the exception of the Afrikan Renaissance Mission, did not register.

The Government does not provide financial support for any religious organization. Formally registered religions are exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income; however, religious organizations are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-you-earn basis, on business activities that generate income. No discriminatory tax treatment towards religious groups was reported during the reporting period.

Christian and Muslim missionaries established the first schools in Ghana. When the Government became a stakeholder in education, mission-run schools partnered with the Government to establish a standard education. Missionaries relinquished some control of the schools through this partnership; however, the majority of a

school's management team is usually comprised of members who adhere to the same faith as that of the school.

Government-administered boarding schools require Christian students to attend a nondenominational service on Sundays. These schools exempt Muslim students from the service and permit them to practice daily prayers. Most schools accommodate special meal arrangements for fasting Muslim students during Ramadan.

Religious and Moral Education is a compulsory subject for every child in both public and private schools at the primary level. At this level, religious instruction is general and does not focus on any single religion. At the secondary level, religious studies is an optional subject, and students can choose between Christian Religious Studies, Islamic Religious Studies, or Traditional African Religion in both private and public schools. The Government did not discriminate in its allocation of resources for any of these courses. There are 12 private colleges and 6 public universities.

The Government often took steps to promote interfaith understanding. At Government meetings and receptions, there was usually a multidenominational invocation led by leaders from various religious groups. In April 2006 President John A. Kufuor expressed his Government's commitment to religious freedom at the Pan-African International Religious Liberty Congress held in Accra.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Ministry of Education regulations prohibit authorities of public schools from compelling students of minority religious groups to worship with the majority religious groups in school. The Minister of Education continued to direct schools to respect the religious rights of all students. Religious freedom was generally respected in schools and was not seen as being a function of the type of school.

Muslim students generally experienced significant religious freedom in public schools. Some school authorities made special efforts to ensure the freedom of Muslim students to practice their religious beliefs by providing, for instance, areas for Muslim worship.

Despite official policies promoting free religious practice in schools, Muslim and Seventh-day Adventist students complained of occasional insensitivity towards their religious practices, such as when administrators regulated school attire or scheduled examinations on their holy days.

In November 2005, 149 students of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church at the University of Ghana, Legon, took legal action to restrain the university from requiring the students to take examinations on Saturdays, the SDA's day of worship. Although the Accra High Court dismissed their claims, the SDA student group continued to engage the university in dialogue hoping that a solution could be reached.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Spokespersons for various religious communities often advocated tolerance towards different religious groups; however, there was occasional tension among some religious groups.

Public discussion continued over religious worship versus traditional indigenous practices and respect for the rights and customs of others in a diverse society. Some religious leaders actively discouraged religiously motivated violence, discrimination, or harassment; others, particularly laypersons associated with evangelical groups, continued to preach intolerance for other groups such as Islam and traditional indigenous religious groups.

While the relationship between the Ahlussunnah and Tijanniya communities has improved over the past few years, on April 12, 2007, 10 persons were injured when members of the two Muslim groups clashed over doctrinal differences at Ejura in the Ashanti Region.

In December 2006 the Apostles Revelation Society held its convention as scheduled. Since 2004 the police had banned the church from holding this convention, ostensibly to deter a possible outbreak of violence between factions within the group. After the natural death of its founder, the group experienced a series of conflicts between factions, leading to court suits, threats, and skirmishes.

The Pentecostal Church noted that longstanding distrust and lingering bad feelings existed between Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians and adherents of Traditional African Religion over the annual ban on drumming and noise making. They also claimed that Muslims still resisted the establishment of churches in communities with high Muslim populations. They cited instances in which families disowned family members and in some cases persecuted those who chose to convert from Islam to Christianity.

Some Muslims continued to feel a sense of political and social exclusion as Christianity continued to influence many aspects of society. Factors such as the token representation of Muslims in national leadership positions, the deferral to only Christian-oriented prayers in public settings, and the ubiquity of Christian slogans contributed to this perception of marginalization and discrimination within the Muslim community.

Practitioners of certain indigenous religious customs also faced discrimination. Trokosi, a religious practice indigenous to the southern Volta region, involves pledging family members, most commonly female teenagers but sometimes children under the age of 10, to extended service at a shrine to atone for another family member's sins. Trokosis (the pledged family members) help with the upkeep of these shrines and pour libations during prayers for extended periods of service, lasting from a few months to 3 years. Labor and human rights activists have decried the practice but also indicated that the number of Trokosis was declining considerably, with perhaps no more than 50 children serving at Trokosi shrines throughout the Volta Region.

According to human rights groups, the decline is due to other belief systems attracting Trokosi adherents and a decline in the number of fetish priests. Supporters of traditional African religious groups, such as the Afrikania Renaissance Mission, accused human rights NGOs of misrepresenting Trokosi beliefs and regarded Government and NGO campaigns against Trokosi as religious persecution. Government agencies, such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), had at times actively campaigned against it.

Belief in witchcraft remained strong in many areas. Traditional village authorities and families continued to banish rural women for suspected witchcraft. Most accused witches were older women, often widows, whom fellow villagers identified as the cause of difficulties such as illness, crop failure, or financial misfortune. Many of these banished women were sent to live in "witch camps," villages in the north of the country populated by suspected witches. The women did not face formal legal sanction if they returned home; however, most feared that they would be beaten or lynched if they returned to their villages. Fearing violence against them, many women accused of being witches did not pursue legal action to challenge charges against them or return to their communities.

This practice was prevalent mainly in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions of the country. While there were no official figures on the number of accused women living in "witch camps," NGOs conducting sensitization workshops in the North estimate this number to be near 3,000. Even though the number of named witches present in the camps was quite high, the numbers had stabilized over the past few years and were slowly decreasing. Outreach and community sensitization by various NGOs have made considerable progress in rehabilitating the accused women back into their communities and preventing acts of violence against them.

Although the law provides protection for alleged witches, there were several cases of lynching and assault against those accused of witchcraft. In August 2006 a local NGO in the Northern Region reported that police refused to take the statement of a woman who had been assaulted by a group of villagers for fear that she would cast a spell on them. The NGO observed that such cases are not uncommon.

The Government, under the auspices of the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit, continued to prosecute persons who committed acts of violence against suspected witches and also refrained from charging anyone solely on the basis of witchcraft.

Human rights activists continued to express concerns about Pentecostal prayer camps in which individuals believed to be possessed by evil spirits were chained up for weeks, physically assaulted, and denied food and water. The camps targeted in particular persons with mental illness. Camp supervisors diagnosed mental illness as a demonic affliction and prevented individuals with this diagnosis from consuming food or water, often for 7 consecutive days, as a method of cleansing victims of their evil spirits. Some victims were estimated to be as young as 6 years old. Families sent these victims to be exorcised of evil spirits or cured of their physical or mental illness. The camps held these victims until they were deemed to be healed. Reports indicated that these practices extended to the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, Western, Ashanti, Volta, and Brong Ahafo regions. Camp leaders pre-

vented CHRAJ from investigating the allegations. In recent visits to prayer camps, foreign observers witnessed more than 100 persons who were forcibly chained to beds or posts and one windowless cell designed for persons with mental illness. The country's psychiatric community was aware of this issue and was pushing for an updated mental health law that protected the rights of the mentally ill.

Unlike in previous reports, there were no reported cases of parents who denied minors medical treatment and polio immunization because medical assistance was incompatible with their religious beliefs.

No anti-Semitic statements were known to be reported throughout the country. Some newspapers occasionally printed anti-Mormon sentiments.

In 2006 the Coalition of Muslim Organizations Ghana (COMOG), an umbrella group for various Muslim organizations, held a national conference on public concerns regarding the handling of the Hajj.

The Ghana Congress of Religions and Peace (GCRP) continued to improve relations between religious groups. The GCRP lobbied the Government on issues of religious freedom, family planning, and anti-abortion laws, and campaigned for compassion for those afflicted with HIV/AIDS.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Embassy officers continued to meet regularly with Government and NGO contacts, as well as with SDA students and SDA leadership at the University of Ghana. Embassy officials worked with these contacts to promote and monitor religious freedom throughout the country. The Embassy discussed religious freedom with NGOs in a human rights roundtable and met with Pentecostal leaders to express concerns about prayer camp abuses.

In late 2006 the Embassy organized several iftar programs throughout the country, including dinners and food donations, in which Embassy officials spoke about the importance of religious tolerance and encouraged collaboration between religious groups both within and across different denominations. Under this framework, the Deputy Chief of Mission hosted a large iftar at her residence to which representatives from all Muslim groups were invited. The Ambassador hosted a similar event for Eid al-Fitr in Kumasi.

Since 2002 outreach to the Muslim community has been a focal point of the Embassy's activities. Under this framework, Embassy officers attended Islamic functions and hosted several events with Muslim leaders in the Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale regions. These events served to promote interfaith dialogue and raise awareness of potential programming opportunities. The Embassy hosted a three-part series of digital video conferences on Muslim American life, which exposed groups of Ghanaian Muslim youth to religious freedom in the United States.

GUINEA

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Religious leaders played critical roles in the national grassroots movement that facilitated constructive political change. The new consensus Government includes a Secretariat General of Religious Affairs, which intends to incorporate both Muslim and Christian religious groups into national decision-making.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 94,926 square miles and a population of 9,947,800. Islam is demographically, socially, and culturally the dominant religion. According to credible estimates, approximately 85 percent of the population adhere to Islam, 10 percent follow various Christian religious groups, and 5 percent hold traditional indigenous beliefs. Muslims generally adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam; there

are relatively few adherents of the Shi'a branch, although they are increasing in number. Among the Christian groups, there are Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and other evangelical groups active in the country and recognized by the Government. There is a small Baha'i community. There are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religious groups among the expatriate community.

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

Demographically, Muslims are a majority in all four major regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, in the southern part of the country, and in the eastern forest region. Christians also reside 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 Peuhl) society made it difficult to establish other religious communities. Traditional indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the forest region.

No data was available regarding active participation in formal religious services or rituals, although involvement was high as traditional cultural rituals were often closely tied to religious practices. The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs estimated that more than 70 percent of Muslims practice their faith regularly.

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

Foreign missionary groups 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of one's choice. To date, protection of religious freedom has not been tested through legal or judicial process.

There is no state religion; however, some believed the Government favors Muslims over non-Muslims. In contrast to previous years, there was no longer a Government entity specific to Islamic affairs. In October 2006 the Government changed the Ministry of the National Islamic League to the Secretariat General of the Islamic League. In March 2007 it became the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs to reflect a more inclusive approach by the Government toward all religious groups.

The Government recognizes and the population celebrates both Islamic and Christian holy days. Holy days celebrated as national holidays include Easter, Assumption Day, Christmas, Tabaski, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Ramadan.

The Government-controlled official press, which includes the *Horoya* newspaper and the Guinean Radio and TV network, reports on religious events involving Islamic and Christian groups. The Government prohibits ownership of private radio and television by religious groups or political parties, but religious and political broadcasting is permitted on privately owned, commercial radio. The Government allocated 75 minutes per week for both Islamic and Christian programming on state-owned national television.

All religious groups newly operating in the country must register with the Ministry of the Interior and Security. Only one religious group, suspected to be linked to an extremist network, was denied recognition. Registration entitles religious organizations to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and some energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate in the country; however, they are not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits available to registered groups. Also, unregistered religious groups are subject to expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal. In practice, no groups have been expelled.

Muslim organizations also must register with the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs. The Secretariat reported that in the past, it denied only one of the applications, from a U.K.-based group, prohibiting the organization to practice in the country. This was the same group denied recognition by the Ministry of the Interior and Security. During the period covered by this report, all groups that submitted applications were registered.

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

Like other religious groups seeking Government recognition, missionary groups must apply and declare their aims and activities to the Ministry of the Interior and Security. 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.

Foreign missionary groups and church-affiliated relief agencies generally operate freely. The Government requires these groups to pay a visa fee.

The Ministry of Education officially registers and monitors all secular and religious private schools to ensure they follow the national standard; however, there were many unregistered and unmonitored private schools. While there were some Government-financed "Franco-Arab" schools, all of which included religious instruction in their curriculum, the vast majority of students attended secular public schools.

There is a general tradition of Islamic schools throughout the country. Islamic 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 madrassahs across the country. The schools are usually associated with a mosque, and some are supported with foreign funds. The madrassahs were not formally linked with the public school system; however, some of these schools offered a comparable curriculum for primary education. In general, they were not recognized by the Government. As with other private schools, madrassahs may be closed arbitrarily, since they do not have official recognition.

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

The Government initiated a project to relaunch the former Inter-Religious Council, composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches and the Ministry of the National Islamic League. During a series of general strikes and the February 2007 declaration of a formal "state of siege," Government and nongovernment actors called on religious leaders to mediate the crisis. The Government 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

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

The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs represented all religious groups, although its leadership remained predominantly Sunni Muslim. The Secretariat's stated policy was to promote better relations with other religious denominations and dialogue aimed at ameliorating interethnic and interreligious tensions.

In the past the Government spoke out against the proliferation of Shi'a fundamentalist groups on the grounds that they "generate confusion and deviation" within the country's Islamic family. However, there were no reports during the reporting period that the Government restricted the religious activities of Shi'a groups. Shi'a officials were represented in the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs.

By transforming the Ministry of the National Islamic League to the General Secretariat of Religious Affairs during the reporting period, the Government took a more inclusive approach to non-Muslim religious groups. Some non-Muslims claimed that the Government continued to use its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. The Government sometimes provided assistance such as vehicles and lodging for events involving other faith groups, and it approved funding for members of the Association of Churches and Evangelic Missions in Guinea. Non-Muslims served in the cabinet, administrative bureaucracy, and armed forces; however, the Government refrained from appointing non-Muslims to important administrative positions in certain parts of the country, in deference to the strong social dominance of Islam in these regions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. However, in some parts of the country, Islam's dominance was such that there was strong social pressure that discouraged conversion from Islam. There were reports that this pressure led some private citizens to limit or retard efforts to acquire land for religious use by other religious groups.

Unlike in the previous report, there was no religiously motivated violence in any part of the country. The legal cases that stemmed from the October 2005 violence between the predominantly Muslim Koniankes and the predominantly Christian Guerzes in N'Zerekore in the Forest Region were all dropped.

SECTION IV. U.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 clergy and religious leaders from all major religious communities and monitors developments affecting religious freedom. The mission initiated a partnership with the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs, and representatives from both organizations met regularly to discuss issues and develop programs of mutual concern.

The Embassy sponsored lectures and seminars that provided information on the religious diversity found in American society. The Embassy regularly included members of the Islamic League in public outreach programming because mosques play an important role in disseminating information in local communities. The Embassy sponsored an interdenominational iftar dinner where senior representatives from Islamic and Christian communities discussed religious freedom and fostering mutual understanding. It was the first event of its kind in the country and set the stage for strengthened collaboration among religious communities during the series of strikes and related violence. A particularly intense debate on ways to foster mutual understanding was launched within the forum of an Embassy-sponsored book discussion. During the symposium "Women of Action," participants discussed the impact of Islam on their freedoms and made recommendations to support their ability to practice Islam and other religious beliefs according to their personal beliefs.

The Ambassador and other U.S. officials raised religious freedom concerns with senior officials at the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs, the senior imams of Conakry and Labe, and religious leaders outside the capital.

GUINEA–BISSAU

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. At the end of the reporting period, the legal status of Ahmadiyya remained uncertain after the Government's attempt in 2005 to ban the group.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 13,948 square miles and a population of 1,472,800. An estimated 38 to 45 percent of the population is Muslim, and 5 to 13 percent is Christian. The remainder of the population follows traditional indigenous or animist religious practices. There are few atheists.

Islam is practiced most widely by the Fula and Mandinka ethnic groups, and Muslims generally live in the north and northeast. Virtually all Muslims are Sunni. The number of Ahmadi is extremely small and not confined to any particular geographic region. When the Government in 2005 attempted to ban Ahmadi activities, many adherents returned to practicing the same form of Sunni Islam that other Muslims in the country practice. Practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs generally live in all but the northern parts of the country. 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.

Foreign missionaries 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. In March 2005 the Government took steps to ban the Muslim group Ahmadiyya. Members of the organization appealed the policy, and the legal status of the organization was not known by the end of the period covered by this report.

There is no state religion. Members of all major religious groups are represented in the national assembly.

Christmas is the only holy day considered a national holiday.

The Government requires that religious groups be licensed and reportedly 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. Ahmadi continued to practice their faith despite their unclear legal standing resulting from the Government's attempt in March 2005 to prohibit Ahmadiyya religious practice.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Society is generally tolerant in religious matters; however, a low literacy rate leaves many susceptible to misinformation and manipulation by local leaders and others.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The Embassy maintained relations with leaders of major religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and missionary groups in the country, including the National Islamic Council and the Catholic bishops. In September 2006 the Embassy sponsored an iftar dinner where Embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues with members of the Muslim community. The Embassy continued to seek opportunities to further the understanding of religious freedom in the United States through public diplomacy programs, such as the International Visitor Program and dissemination of publications promoting tolerance.

KENYA

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, some Muslim leaders continued to charge that the Government is hostile toward Muslims.

While there were very few reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, some Muslims perceived themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in the predominantly Christian country. There were some interfaith movements, such as the Inter-religious Council of Kenya. The Council brought together Christian, Hindu, and Muslim leaders but had a very limited public profile, occasionally commenting on current 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 an area of 225,000 square miles and a population of 35.5 million; approximately 80 percent live in rural areas. Approximately 80 percent of the country practices Christianity; Protestants represent 58 percent of the Christian majority, Roman Catholics represent 42 percent. Ten percent of the population practice Islam, less than 1 percent practice Hinduism, Sikhism, and Baha'i, and the remainder follow various traditional indigenous religions. There are very few atheists. Some Muslim groups claim to represent up to 30 percent of the population; this figure is not supported by demographic data.

Certain groups tend to dominate particular regions. For example, North Eastern Province, where the population is chiefly ethnic Somali, is home to 15 percent of the Muslim population. Sixty percent of the Muslim population lives in Coast Province, comprising 50 percent of the total population there. Western areas of Coast Province are mostly Christian. The north-central part of the country is home to 10 percent of the Muslims, making it the majority religious group there. Apart from the ethnic Somali population in Nairobi, the rest of the country is largely Christian.

Many foreign missionary groups operate in the country. The Government generally permits missionary groups to assist the poor and to operate schools and hospitals. Missionaries openly promote their religious beliefs and encounter little interference from the Government.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. However, Muslim and Christian groups remained engaged in a long-standing debate over whether special Islamic courts should be recognized in the country's Constitution. The process of reviewing the Constitution was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. Muslim groups voiced concerns regarding a proposed antiterrorism bill, which they perceived as anti-Muslim.

The Constitution and the Kadhis' Courts Act of 1967 establish a venue for the adjudication of certain types of civil cases, based on Islamic law. The Constitution provides for Kadhis' courts in situations where "all the parties profess the Muslim religion" in suits addressing "questions of Muslim law relating to personal status, marriage, divorce, or inheritance." Kadhis' courts, however, are "subordinate" courts, meaning that the secular High Court has jurisdiction to supervise any civil or criminal proceedings, and any party involved in the proceedings may refer a question involving interpretation, or directly appeal a decision, to the High Court.

Some church groups argue that the Constitution's inclusion of the Kadhis' courts gives preferential treatment to Muslims; however, the relevant section of the Constitution remained in place.

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. After registration, religious organizations may apply for tax-exempt status, including exemption from paying duty on imported goods. The Government does not use tax laws to favor one religious group over another, although some religious organizations allege that it does. Religious organizations generally received equal treatment from the Government; however, some small splinter groups found it difficult to register when the Government viewed them as an offshoot of a larger religious organization. On December 26, 2006, the media reported a Government directive requiring religious groups to provide membership lists to the Government. The Registrar, however, noted that it requires only that organizations submit the minutes of their annual general meetings, including who was in attendance. According to the National Commission on Human Rights, no religious group complained that such a directive is being enforced.

In predominantly Christian areas, there are morning prayers in public schools. All children participate in the assembly but are not punished if they remain silent during prayers. Many predominantly Muslim public schools, especially high schools, have adjacent mosques that are used by some students for prayers.

Islamic and Hindu institutions sponsor a few Government-supported public schools through payment of teachers' salaries and the provision of equipment. Often

churches provide the land and the buildings for the schools, while the Government provides the teachers. After independence in 1963, the Government nationalized religious schools. This is regarded by religious leaders as a long-ago fait accompli. While religious leaders are resigned to this arrangement, there were at times disputes over school management and occasionally the closing of schools.

Some Muslims expressed concern that the lack of a university in Coast Province, which has a large Muslim population, hinders educational opportunities for Muslims.

The Ministry of Information and Communications approved regional radio and television broadcast licenses for several Christian and Muslim groups, including most recently Radio Salaam. The petition of the Catholic Church for a national frequency remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report. To date, the Ministry has not granted a national frequency to any media organization except the Government-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation. However, it assigned a series of regional broadcasting frequencies to some organizations, both secular and religious, to give their broadcasts national reach.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, some Muslim leaders charged that the Government was hostile toward Muslims. The leaders claimed that, since the 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, the 2002 terrorist attacks in Mombasa, terrorist attacks elsewhere, and continued instability in Somalia, Government discrimination against their community worsened, especially concerning access to identity documents. According to these leaders, authorities more rigorously scrutinized the identification cards of persons with Muslim surnames and sometimes required additional documentation of citizenship, such as birth certificates of parents and even grandparents. In response to these claims, the Government stated that heightened scrutiny was necessary to deter illegal immigration, in particular illegal border crossings from Somalia, and was not used to discriminate against religious affiliation.

Practicing witchcraft is a criminal offense under colonial-era laws; however, persons generally were prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with some other charge, such as murder. The practice of witchcraft is widely understood 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. Often adherents of main-stream religious groups also maintained some witchcraft-related beliefs.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

A credible public opinion poll carried out in 2006 asked respondents which basic human right they thought was best protected by the Government. Freedom of religion ranked highest (46 percent); however, the satisfaction rate was lower in the predominantly Muslim northern part of the country (33 percent). The same survey gauged which rights respondents were aware of without prompting. Overall 38 percent of Kenyans were aware of their right to freedom of worship, but in Muslim-dominated North Eastern Province the figure was 71 percent. The study concluded that among all civil and political rights, only awareness of freedom of religion increased from 2005.

In early November 2006 the Government expelled two American Christian missionaries for distributing material highly offensive to Muslims. The missionaries produced cartoon books containing images of the Prophet Muhammad burning in hell.

The Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya and other Muslim organizations, including the Muslim Human Rights Forum, accused the Government of harassment in the guise of anti-terrorist measures.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. 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.

Some Muslim groups believe that the Government and business communities deliberately impede development in predominantly Muslim areas.

In mid-February 2007 a mob killed an 81-year-old man of the Mijikenda community in Kilifi District, Coast Province, alleging that he had cursed his three grandchildren who had died a few days earlier. One suspect was arrested. On January 10, 2007, *The Nation* reported a trend in the killings of elderly residents in Kilifi District, on suspicion of witchcraft. Officials explained that the local Mijikenda community attributes misfortune to the work of wizards.

In May 2006 masked gunmen stormed Hope FM, a radio station headquartered at Nairobi Pentecostal Church, killing one person, shooting three others, and setting fire to the property. At the end of the period covered by this report, the police investigation was ongoing and officials had not yet concluded whether the attack was motivated by religious intolerance.

SECTION IV. U.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.

The Ambassador and other U.S. officials frequently engaged with religious leaders on matters of mutual concern. U.S. officials met regularly with Muslim leaders on the coast, in the northeast, and in Nairobi to discuss their sense of marginalization and to respond to questions about U.S. policy.

LESOTHO

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,720 square miles and a population of 1.8 million.

Christianity is the dominant religion. The Christian Council of Lesotho, made up of representatives of all major Christian churches in the country, estimates that approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian. Roman Catholics represent 45 percent of the population, Lesotho Evangelicals 26 percent, and Anglican and other Christian groups an additional 19 percent. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'i, and members of traditional indigenous religions comprise the remaining 10 percent of the population.

While Christians can be found throughout the country, Muslims live primarily in the northeast. Most practitioners of Islam are of Asian origin, while the majority of Christians are members of the indigenous Basotho. Many Christians practice their traditional cultural beliefs and rituals along with Christianity. The Catholic and Anglican Churches have fused some aspects of local culture into their services; for example, the singing of hymns during services has developed into a traditional call and response in Sesotho—the indigenous language—as well as English. Indigenous religious beliefs also influence Songoma, a form of traditional medicine.

Missionaries 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion and no evidence that the Government favors any particular religion.

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

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

According to immigration and labor officials, they scrutinize visas for Nigerian missionaries coming to work in the country due to reports of past questionable business dealings by some Nigerian missionaries.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

With the assistance of the Libyan Embassy, the Muslim community tried to build a larger mosque, training center, and madrassah; however, the community claimed it was hindered by bureaucratic delays. While the Muslim community and the Libyan Embassy spoke publicly about the planned mosque, a formal request to the Government to identify a location for the mosque was not filed. The bureaucratic delays cited reflect the Muslim community's perception that the Government is not eager to enter into negotiations concerning a prospective site.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Mutual understanding and cooperation between Christians and Muslims is the norm. There were ecumenical efforts to promote tolerance and cooperation on social matters. In addition to their traditional antipoverty initiatives, the Christian Council of Lesotho, a nongovernmental organization composed of various Christian denominations, sponsored ecumenical election monitoring groups in 2005 and 2007 to promote peaceful elections and tolerance of diverse political ideals.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy and local religious leaders discussed their roles in maintaining political peace and assisting with the consolidation of democracy. Just prior to the February 2007 general elections, leaders of the country's major religious groups held a prayer session to support a

peaceful and fair election. Senior Government officials, community leaders, and diplomats participated, including representatives from the U.S. mission.

LIBERIA

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

Despite frequent interaction among religious groups, some tension remained. There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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 promotes religious freedom by participating in and hosting interfaith events, supporting faith-based civil society organizations, and meeting regularly with prominent members of various religious communities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 43,000 square miles and a population of slightly more than 3 million. It is estimated that as much as 40 percent of the population practices either Christianity or Christianity combined with elements of traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Approximately 40 percent exclusively practices traditional indigenous religious beliefs. An estimated 20 percent of the population practices Islam, which continues to gain adherents. A small percentage is Baha'i, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, or atheist.

Christian denominations include the Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and AME Zion denominations, and a variety of Pentecostal churches. Some of the Pentecostal movements are affiliated with churches outside the country, while others are independent. There are also members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and Seventh-day Adventists. Christians live throughout the country.

The Muslim population is mainly found among the Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups. Vai live predominantly in the west, but Mandingo reside throughout the country. Ethnic groups in all regions participate in the traditional religious practices of the Poro and Sande secret societies.

A large number of foreign missionary groups work openly and freely in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion. Government ceremonies open and close with prayers and may include the singing of hymns. The prayers and hymns are usually Christian but occasionally are Islamic. There was one Muslim cabinet minister, one Muslim Supreme Court judge, a few Muslim assistant ministers, and nine Muslim members in the legislature during the period covered by this report.

The Government observes major Christian holy days, including Easter and Christmas, as national holidays, but not Islamic holy days. The Government mandates that public businesses and markets, including Muslim businesses and shops, remain closed on Sundays and major Christian holy days, an issue that Muslim leaders have brought to the Legislative Assembly and the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled that it was constitutional for the Government to allow market closures on Sundays on the grounds that markets needed to be cleaned once a week. There is no legal requirement to excuse Muslims from employment or classes for Friday prayers, although some employers do so.

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

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Public schools offer religious education, particularly Christian education, but do not require it. Students can opt out of religious instruction, and parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. The Government subsidizes private schools, most of which are affiliated with either Christian or Muslim organizations. Some Muslims claimed that the 2006 national budget underfunded Islamic schools.

The Government has not specifically dedicated material resources to anti-bias and religious tolerance education. However, it is supportive of efforts to promote interfaith understanding. In October 2006 the President distributed bags of rice to the Muslim community during the holy month of Ramadan.

High-level Government officials were required to take oaths when assuming their new office. Christians kissed the Bible, and Muslims kissed the Qur'an.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Although some Muslims hold senior Government positions, many Muslims believed that they need greater representation in the Government. Some Muslim leaders felt that certain Islamic holy days should be national holidays, since many Christian holy days are celebrated. In October 2006 some Muslim leaders asked the Government to mark the end of Ramadan as a public holiday. There was no Government response.

On July 20, 2006, the Liberian National Police (LNP) Inspector General warned Muslim women not to wear veils in public but did not prohibit the use of headscarves. Muslim religious leaders objected, but there were no reports that Muslim women were discriminated against or arrested for wearing veils during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government successfully prosecuted five persons responsible for killing a man who refused to join a traditional religious society.

During the reporting period, Government officials called for an end to ritualistic killings practiced by some indigenous religion adherents and vowed to prosecute offenders.

There were more interfaith prayers at Government and public meetings. In July 2006 the President held discussions with Muslim leaders regarding concerns of the country's Muslim community.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Despite frequent interaction among religious groups, some tension remained. There were some abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The Inter-Religious Council promotes dialogue among various religious communities. In February 2007 religious leaders helped mediate a legislative leadership crisis, which ended with the resignation of the Speaker of the House.

Ethnic tensions persisted between the Mandingo and several other ethnic groups, which were mostly animist and Christian. However, land disputes between them in Lofa, Nimba, and Bong counties were being resolved and did not become violent.

In April 2007 a newspaper reported that some members of the legislature said they would not vote for a Muslim to become Speaker of the House, referring to the one Muslim candidate who was contesting the election. Senators rejected the formation of a Muslim Caucus in May 2007.

Ritual killings, in which killers remove body parts from their victims for use in traditional rituals, reportedly occurred during the reporting period. There was little reliable information about traditional religious groups associated with ritual killings, and the number of such killings was difficult to ascertain. Many believe that practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs among the Grebo and Krahn, who are concentrated in the southeast, engage in ritual killings. Body parts of a person believed to be powerful are considered the most effective for ritual purposes. In some cases the rituals reportedly involve eating body parts to gain special powers. Reports of alleged ritualistic killings came from all parts of the country. The

Government treats ritualistic killing cases as homicide and investigates and prosecutes them accordingly.

In October 2006 the Liberian National Police and the U.N. Police found 37 persons who had been kidnapped, accused of witchcraft, and sentenced to trial by ordeal in Nimba County. In November 2006 the Ministry of Internal Affairs revoked all licenses of those who practiced trial by ordeal with the poisonous substance known as "sassywood."

On March 29, 2007, the Seventh Judicial Circuit Court of Grand Gedeh County sentenced five men to life imprisonment for the September 2005 beheading of Hastings Tokpah, who refused to join a traditional Poro society because he was a Christian.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officers hosted events, including an iftar dinner on October 19, 2006, to discuss religious freedom issues with Christian and Muslim leaders. The Ambassador and other Embassy officers participated in religious ceremonies and spoke at interfaith meetings to show support for religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.

MADAGASCAR

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, a constitutional referendum was approved by the electorate on April 4, 2007. Amid numerous other changes, the explicit separation of church and state was eliminated with the deletion of the word "secular" from the description of the republic.

The U.S. 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 19,448,815 square miles and a population of 18 million. Although precise official figures were unavailable, approximately half of the population is Christian. There are four main Christian denominations. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination, followed by the Reformed Protestant Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). The Lutheran and Anglican Churches account for most of the remainder of the country's Christians. A significant minority of citizens followed traditional indigenous religions.

Muslims constitute slightly less than 10 percent of the population, with strong concentrations in the north and the northwest. Aboriginal and ethnic Indians and Pakistanis who immigrated over the past century made up the majority of the Muslims in the country. There is a small number of Hindus among the ethnic Indian population. The country has a very small Jewish population.

There are several foreign missionary groups that operate freely. Several faith-based organizations, some with international affiliations, are involved in health and social services, development projects, schools, and higher education.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full, and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion. The April 4 constitutional referendum eliminated the explicit separation of church and state, but did not diminish legal protection for freedom of religion. President Ravalomanana occasionally expressed a desire to transform the country into "a Christian state;" however, there was no attempt to establish a state religion, and most believed his comments only indicated a desire to enshrine Christian principles in the day-to-day life of the country. President Ravalomanana's position as a lay vice-president of FJKM, one of the country's four

principal Christian denominations, generated some allegations that church and state interests are not kept entirely separate.

The law mandates that religious organizations register with the Ministry of Interior. By registering, religious organizations acquire the legal status necessary to receive direct bequests and other gifts. To qualify as a religious association, groups must consist of at least 100 members, with an elected administrative council of no more than 9 members, each of whom must be a Malagasy citizen. If the group's leadership and faithful are foreign (as is the case with the majority of the country's Muslims), they have the right to form an association "reputed to be foreign." Once the association's membership expands to 1,000 members, the administrative council may apply to be officially recognized. The state officially recognizes 9 houses of worship and 109 religious organizations. The Ministry approved five new religious organizations between March 2006 and April 2007. No religious group was denied registration during the period covered by this report.

Religious organizations that fail to meet the Ministry of Interior's registration requirements are free to register as simple associations. Simple associations do not have the right to receive gifts or hold religious services. If these groups overstep what is allowed for their status, they violate the law and in rare circumstances are subject to legal action. In 2007 ministry officials estimated there were more than 1,000 religious organizations in the country operating without official state recognition, including both simple associations and unregistered organizations.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Government banned the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (EURD), based on a threat to law and order. The Ministry of Interior stated that if the applications to reconstitute the church fulfilled the legal requirement of having Malagasy leadership, they would likely be approved. Former members of banned organizations face higher scrutiny when petitioning for recognition as an official religious organization.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversions

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Some members of the Muslim community stated that the President's failure to invite them to events such as prayer breakfasts and public holidays featuring religious leaders marginalizes the community. They also expressed concern about their legal status in the country, as some lacked citizenship despite their long-standing presence; others suggested their ethnic/religious difference sometimes led to more limited access to Government 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. Representatives of the Embassy regularly meet with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups.

MALAWI

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious beliefs or practices; however, there was some tension between Christians and Muslims during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 45,747 square miles and a population of 13 million. Eighty percent of the population is Christian. Among the Christian groups, 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 13 percent of the population. The vast majority of Muslims are Sunni, adhering to either the Qadriya or Sukkutu groups. There are also Hindus, Baha'is, and small numbers of Rastafarians and Jews. Four percent of the population define themselves as atheist, although this may include adherents of informal traditional African beliefs.

Foreign missionary groups are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full, and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. In a 2007 ruling, the Supreme Court declared that religious freedom is a right that cannot be limited or restricted. There is no state religion.

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

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

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

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In contrast to previous reporting periods, there were no reports of conflict between Government and Rastafarian leaders over an unofficial ban on long hair in public schools. Although there is no law relating to hair length, some schools prohibit long hair as part of their dress code. Government officials maintain that this policy is not intended to infringe upon any religious rights.

Regional voting trends and political affiliation sometimes reflect the concentration of different religious groups in certain regions of the country.

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

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious beliefs or practices; however, there were occasional tensions between Christians and Muslims that appeared to be fueled largely by politics. Although there were no significant conflicts, these minor tensions were especially evident following attempts by the country's Christian President to remove the Muslim Vice President from office. Christians, Muslims, and a small Hindu minority generally coexisted peacefully, often participating in business or civil society organizations together.

SECTION IV. U.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 maintain frequent contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy continued to promote religious tolerance through grants, meetings, exchange programs, and the distribution of reading materials.

The Embassy hosted a 2-week speaker program on Muslim life in America and religious tolerance in April 2007. As part of that program, the Ambassador hosted an ecumenical dinner that brought together Muslim and Christian leaders. On several occasions, Embassy officials appeared on local radio programs (including a Radio Islam program) to discuss issues of religious freedom and tolerance.

MALI

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

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 474,764 square miles and a population of 11,995,400. Muslims comprise an estimated 90 percent of the population; the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni. Approximately 5 percent of the population is Christian, and the Christian community is roughly two-thirds Catholic and one-third Protestant. The remaining 5 percent practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs or no religion. Atheism and agnosticism are rare. Most immigrants come from neighboring countries and either practice Sunni Islam or belong to a Christian denomination. The majority of citizens practice their religion daily.

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

The Muslim community in general is tolerant and respectful of minority religious groups. Mosques associated with Dawa (an Islamic fundamentalist group) are located in Kidal, Mopti, and Bamako. Dawa has gained some adherents among unemployed youth living in poorer neighborhoods. However, the Dawa group's influence was less evident than in previous reporting periods. The Salafi/Wahhabi movement is evident throughout out the country, although, as with other forms of Islam in Mali, is not as exclusionary as practiced in other countries.

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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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. The Government does not require traditional indigenous religious groups to register.

Foreign missionary groups operated without Government interference, and they did not link the benefits of their development activities to conversion. The Government allows members of various religious groups to proselytize freely.

Prior to making important decisions on potentially controversial national issues, the Government consults with a "Committee of Wise Men" that includes the Catholic archbishop and Protestant and Muslim leaders.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Minister of Territorial Administration and Local Collectivities may prohibit religious publications that defame another religion; however, there were no reports of instances of such prohibitions during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Adherents of different religious groups are often part of the same family. Followers of one religion attend religious ceremonies of other religious groups, especially weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers met regularly with religious authorities and Government officials who deal with these issues. Embassy officials expanded dialogue with Muslim groups to promote religious freedom, mutual understanding, and the continued secularism of the Government. The Embassy maintained contact with the foreign missionary community and worked with Government officials and societal leaders to promote religious freedom.

MAURITANIA

The 1991 Constitution establishes the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the religion of its citizens and the state. However, a military junta took power in August 2005, overthrew the elected president, dissolved Parliament, suspended parts of the Constitution, and formed a transitional government. On April 19, 2007, the junta and transitional government returned control to a democratically elected president in free and fair elections. The President convened the newly-elected Parliament on April 26, thus returning the country to constitutional order. The transitional and new governments made no significant changes to the Constitution or the previous regime's policies on religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Both the transitional and current governments maintained laws regarding religious freedom and, unlike during prior reporting periods, made no arrests for proselytizing. However, both governments limited freedom of religion by prohibiting the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the proselytization of Muslims.

There were changes in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

In contrast with the previous reporting period, there were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the reporting period; however, a constitutional mandate continued to restrict small non-Muslim populations to meeting in the country's few Roman Catholic or other Christian churches.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 419,212 square miles and a population of 3,270,100. Almost the entire population practices Sunni Islam. There are very small numbers of non-Muslims and Roman Catholic or other Christian churches in Nouakchott, Atar, Zouerate, Nouadhibou, and Rosso. Although there are no synagogues, a very small number of expatriates practice Judaism.

There were several foreign faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) active in humanitarian and developmental work in the country. The largest was World Vision, involved in food and other aid projects. Other faith-based NGOs included World Advocates and Caritas, each providing various services including the provision of medical care, feeding centers, microfinance, and water treatment.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The 1991 Constitution establishes the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the sole religion of its citizens and the state. Both the transitional and current governments, like the previous Taya regime, limited freedom of religion by prohibiting the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the proselytization of Muslims. A constitutional mandate restricts small non-Muslim populations to meeting in the few Roman Catholic or other Christian churches. Other than these constraints, non-Muslim resident expatriates and a few non-Muslim citizens generally practice their religious beliefs freely.

Both the transitional and current governments and citizenry considered Islam to be the essential cohesive element unifying the country's various ethnic groups. There is a cabinet-level Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Education. The High Council of Islam, consisting of six imams, advised the transitional and current governments on the conformance of legislation to Islamic precepts. Although the transitional and current governments provided a small stipend to the imam of the Central Mosque in the capital, mosques and Islamic schools are normally supported by their members and other donors.

The transitional and current governments did not register religious groups; however, secular NGOs, including humanitarian and development NGOs affiliated with religious groups, must register with the Ministry of the Interior. The transitional and current governments generally did not tax nonprofit organizations, including both religious groups and secular NGOs.

The judiciary consists of a single system of courts that conforms to the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) in matters concerning the family and modern legal principles in all other matters.

The transitional and current governments observed Islamic holy days as national holidays, but this practice did not negatively affect other religious groups.

Both the privately run Islamic schools and the Government's public schools include classes on religion. These classes teach the history and principles of Islam and the classical Arabic of the Qur'an. Although attendance at these religious classes is ostensibly required, many students, the great majority of whom are Muslim, decline to attend them for various ethnolinguistic, religious, and personal reasons. Since these classes determine a disproportionately small percentage of the overall grade, students are able to advance in school and graduate with diplomas, provided they compensate for their failure to attend the religion classes by their performance in other classes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The implementation of Islamic law has created limited restrictions on religious freedom. Shari'a, proclaimed the law of the land under a previous Government in 1983, includes the Qur'anic prohibition against apostasy or conversion to a religion other than Islam; however, this prohibition was never codified in civil law or enforced. The small number of known converts from Islam suffered no social ostracism, and there were no reports of societal or governmental attempts to punish them during the period covered by this report.

Although there is no specific legal prohibition against proselytizing by non-Muslims, in practice the former Government prohibited such activity through the use of article 11 of the Press Act, which bans the publication of any material that is against, contradicts, or otherwise threatens Islamic principles. The transitional government effectively suspended article 11 in April 2006 as part of its effort to liberalize the press. However, the article's suspension was not seen as a move to increase

religious freedoms, and the transitional and current governments continued to prohibit the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the proselytization of Muslims. Foreign faith-based NGOs limit their activities to humanitarian and development assistance.

Although Bibles were neither printed nor publicly sold in the country, the possession of Bibles and other non-Islamic religious materials in private homes was not illegal, and these resources were 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, the Government does not require its employees or members of the ruling political party 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. In April 2006 the transitional government approved certain constitutional amendments that were overwhelmingly approved by voters in a national referendum. One amendment that established a presidential oath of office taken in the name of God was used to swear in the elected president on April 19, 2007.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Unlike in the previous year, there were no instances of persons being detained or questioned in connection with an investigation into proselytizing.

In May 2006 the transitional government arrested six Ghanaian, Guinean, and Nigerian Protestant pastors in Nouakchott, seized their religious materials, and padlocked their unauthorized churches which were run in private houses. Police released the pastors within 24 hours and told them that their churches were illegal and would remain closed. Officials ordered the pastors to cease all future religious meetings, and their churches remained closed at the end of the reporting period. Several weeks earlier, national security forces briefly detained three Christian citizens for allegedly proselytizing.

From March to July 2005, the former (pre-transitional) Government detained approximately 80 Islamists, who it claimed were tied to terrorism. In 2005 the former Government released 14 prisoners and charged 37 others with membership in unrecognized groups or for inciting violence and making harmful political statements at mosques. The transitional government released 21 of the remaining 66 soon after assuming power, and later in 2005, released an additional 24 for lack of evidence, leaving 21 in prison. Three of these prisoners escaped in April 2006, and officials released eight others with charges still pending. Since that time, the transitional government arrested several other persons it claimed had links to terrorist groups. These arrests appeared to be based on alleged political activities rather than religious beliefs. On June 5, 2007, the Regional Criminal Court of Nouakchott acquitted 24 of the 25 suspects, citing insufficient evidence for conviction. The court sentenced in absentia the remaining suspect to 2 years in prison for falsification of identity papers and illegal possession of a weapon. Thirteen others purportedly linked to a 2005 terrorist attack at Lemghetty remained in prison, and one other was released on bail while standing trial at the end of this reporting period.

In late 2005 transitional government authorities arrested and detained a Western citizen for 48 hours for distributing non-Islamic religious materials to citizens. Several weeks after his release, officials rearrested the individual for possession of non-Islamic religious materials—despite the fact that possessing these materials is legal—and expelled him from the country.

The transitional and current governments continued to restrict Protestant groups from meeting in members' homes until they received official recognition.

As in the previous reporting period, both the transitional and current governments restricted the use of mosque loudspeakers exclusively for the call to prayer and Friday service, in accordance with a 2003 law that prohibits the use of mosques for any form of political activity, including the distribution of propaganda and incitement to violence.

The Government has never recognized any non-Islamic groups, including the Catholic Church, which openly operates its facility in Nouakchott.

Shari'a 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.

Beyond the Islamists previously mentioned, there were no additional reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the transitional and current governments as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy monitored developments affecting religious freedom and maintained contact with imams and the leaders of other religious groups. These contacts included the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Education.

The U.S. Embassy actively engaged prominent religious leaders in a dialogue to broaden mutual understanding of religious freedom principles and to explain the freedom with which Muslims practice their religion in America.

MAURITIUS

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

Underlying tensions between the Hindu majority and Christian and Muslim minorities persisted; however, members of each group worshipped without hindrance.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 718 square miles and a population of 1.2 million. In the 2000 census, an estimated 50 percent of the population claimed to be Hindu, 32 percent Christian, and 17 percent Muslim. Less than 1 percent claimed to be atheist, agnostic, or of another religious group. There are no official figures for those who actively practice their faith, but there are estimates that the figure is approximately 60 percent for all religious groups.

Seventy-three percent of Christians are Roman Catholic. The remaining 27 percent are members of the following groups: Seventh-day 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; a minority are Shi'a.

On the main island, the north is more Hindu, and the center more Catholic. There are also large populations of Muslims and Catholics in the main cities of Port Louis, Quatre Bornes, and Curepipe. Most mosques and churches are concentrated in these areas. The island of Rodrigues, with a population of 36,000, is 92 percent Catholic.

The country is a small island nation, and its ethnic groups, known as "communal groups," are tightly knit. Intermarriage is not common, although the most recent census indicated that it is increasing. There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity usually are Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice both Buddhism and Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent usually are Catholic.

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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

In March 2007 the Supreme Court ruled that a mosque could not use loudspeakers for the daily calls to prayer, in accordance with the Noise Prevention Regulations (see Section III).

Religious organizations that were present prior to independence, such as the Catholic Church, Church of England, Presbyterian Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims, are recognized in a parliamentary decree. These groups also receive an annual lump-sum payment from the Ministry of Finance based upon the number of adherents as determined by the census. Newer religious organizations (which must have a minimum of seven members) were registered by the Registrar of Associations and were recognized as legal entities with tax-exempt privileges. The Government was not known to have refused registration to any group.

Foreign missionary groups were allowed to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although there are no Government regulations restricting their presence or limiting their proselytizing activities, groups must obtain both a resident permit and a work permit for each missionary. The Prime Minister's Office is the final authority on issuance of these required documents to missionaries. While there are no explicit limits on the ability of missionaries to operate, there are limits on the number of missionaries permitted to obtain the requisite visas and work permits. During the reporting period, 226 missionaries from various religious groups applied for residence permits. Eleven were rejected. Of the 215 applicants who received permits, 49 were new cases, and 166 were renewals.

National holidays are representative of the multireligious, multiethnic population. Hindu (Maha Shivratree, Ganesh Chathurthi, and Divali), Tamil (Thaipoosam Cavadee, and Ougadi), Christian (Christmas and All Saints' Day), and Muslim (Eid al-Fitr) holy days are national holidays.

The Ministry of Arts and Culture is responsible for promoting cultural interaction among different cultural groups within the country and sponsored events aimed at fostering cultural programs that included religious components.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In March 2007 the Supreme Court ruled that a mosque in a residential area of Quatre Bornes could not use loudspeakers for the daily calls to prayer in accordance with the Noise Prevention Regulations. This led to fervent public objections by some representatives of the Muslim community, as the judgment was interpreted by a segment of the Muslim community as an infringement on their right to practice their religion. Tensions were alleviated when the plaintiff and the mosque compromised on an acceptable decibel level for the use of loudspeakers.

Due to the predominance of Hindu citizens in the upper echelons of the civil service, some minorities, usually Creoles and Muslims, alleged that they were prevented from reaching positions in the higher levels of Government

While some Creole political groups alleged that Christian Creoles received unjust treatment from the police, there was no evidence that this was based on religious differences. Observers believed that such incidents likely were a result largely of ethnic differences, since the police force was predominantly Indo-Mauritian and because fact that Creoles tended to live in poorer areas, where crime was more prevalent.

Foreign missionaries sometimes were prohibited from residing in the country beyond 5 years (which would permit them to seek citizenship). Religious organizations were permitted to bring new missionaries to replace them; however, groups sometimes encountered bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining work permits and residence visas for replacements. This occasionally prevented such organizations from replacing departing missionaries in a timely fashion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Occasional tensions between the Hindu majority and Christian and Muslim minorities persisted; however, no violent confrontations occurred 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.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 308,642 square miles and a population of 19.9 million. According to the most recent census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics in 1997, half of the population does not profess to practice a religion or creed; however, religious leaders expected the census scheduled for late 2007 to show that virtually all of these persons recognize or practice some form of traditional indigenous religion. According to the 1997 census, 24 percent are Roman Catholic, 22 percent are Protestant, and 20 percent are Muslim. Many Muslim leaders disagree with this statistic, claiming that since Islam is the major religion practiced in the most populous provinces of the country, at least 50 percent of the population must be Muslim.

Religious communities are dispersed throughout the country. The northern provinces are predominantly Muslim, particularly along the coastal strip, but some areas of the northern interior have a stronger concentration of Protestant or Catholic communities. Protestants and Catholics are generally more numerous in the southern and central regions, but Muslim minority populations are also present in these areas.

The National Directorate of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Justice states evangelical Christians represent the fastest growing religious group in the country. Generally religious communities tend to draw their members from across ethnic, political, economic, and racial lines. The growing South Asian immigrant population is predominantly Muslim and follows the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence.

There are 732 religious denominations and 144 religious organizations registered with the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice. During the reporting period 10 denominations and 20 religious organizations were registered. Major Christian religious groups include Anglican, Baptist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Congregational, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, as well as evangelical, apostolic, and Pentecostal churches. Many small, independent Protestant and Catholic churches that have split from mainstream denominations fuse African traditional beliefs and practices within a Christian framework.

The Government reports that no Islamic subgroups are registered; however, the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni, with the small Shi'a minority principally of South Asian origin. The three principal Islamic organizations are the Mohammedan Community, Islamic Congress, and Islamic Council. The Kuwaiti-funded and Sudanese-managed nongovernmental organization (NGO) African Muslim Agency conducted humanitarian work, as did the Muslim development agency Aga Khan. Muslim journalists report that the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a is not particularly important for many local Muslims, and Muslims are much more likely to identify themselves by the local religious leader they follow than as Sunni or Shi'a. The country's Muslim population represents the four schools of thought in Islamic law: Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali.

Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i groups are registered and constitute a very small percentage of the population.

The country's leading mosques and the Catholic Church have gradually eliminated many traditional indigenous practices from their places of worship, instituting practices that reflect a stricter interpretation of sacred texts; however, some Chris-

tian and Muslim adherents continue to incorporate traditional practices and rituals, and religious authorities have generally been permissive of such practices.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely in the country. Some groups offer religious teaching centers to their local communities, while others provide scholarships for students to study in their respective countries.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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; however, Muslim leaders and journalists objected to what they say is silent discrimination against the Muslim community. They cited the example of National Family Day, a holiday that is observed on December 25. Officially, there are no national holidays that are religious in nature, but some members of the Muslim community believe that Eid al-Fitr should be made a national holiday if Christmas is observed de facto under the guise of family unification.

The Government officially acknowledges the Muslim Eid festival on a date recognized by the South Asians, to the dismay of Black Muslims, who celebrate the festival on a different day.

While all major religious groups are well represented in the National Assembly and in various Government ministries, many Muslims felt like second class citizens, primarily because the majority of leadership positions in the Government and media services were held by Christians.

As a result of the absence of a prominent Muslim leader on the Council of State, a constitutionally mandated advisory body created in 2005, and the subsequent claims by Muslim leaders of favoritism toward Christians, a significant number of Muslim leaders lobbied the Government during the period covered by this report for the appointment of a Muslim as Ombudsman.

The Law on Religious Freedom requires religious institutions and missionary organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice, reveal their principal source of funding, and provide the names of at least 500 followers in good standing. No particular benefits or privileges are associated with registration, and there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious group during the period covered by this report. The Christian Council reported that not all religious groups register, but unregistered groups worship unhindered by the Government.

The Government routinely grants visas and residence permits to foreign missionaries. Like all foreign residents, missionaries face a somewhat burdensome process in obtaining legal residency; however, they generally conduct their activities without Government interference.

The Constitution gives religious groups the right to acquire and own assets, and these institutions are allowed by law to own and operate schools, which are increasing in numbers. Several Islamic schools were under construction or rehabilitation. Many Protestant organizations have also opened primary and secondary schools in recent years, primarily in the central and northern provinces. The Catholic University has educational facilities in Beira, Nampula, Cuamba, and Pemba. Religious instruction is a primary focus of the new primary and secondary schools, but the universities associated with religious denominations either do not emphasize or offer religious studies. Many students at Catholic University branches are Muslim, particularly in Pemba. Religious instruction in public schools is strictly prohibited.

Religious activities and positions were reported in the press without restriction; however, some Muslim journalists complained that the press gave more coverage to Christian holidays than Islamic days of cultural and religious importance.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Constitution prohibits political parties from being directly affiliated with a religion or church and from using religious symbols.

Most places of worship nationalized by the Government in 1977 have been returned to their respective religious organizations; however, the Catholic Church and a few Muslim communities maintain that other properties, including schools, health centers, and private residences, remain in state hands. The groups continued to press for their return. The issue of restitution is complex, as many of these buildings continue to be used for Government-administered schools and clinics. While the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restitution lies with the provincial government, the Directorate for Religious Affairs is mandated to address

the general issue of restitution. Return of the properties often is delayed due to the construction of new facilities, particularly schools and health clinics. The Papal Nunciature reported that the Government continued to occupy properties in Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, and Zambezia Provinces that were used for schools, seminaries, and residences, and that the Vatican had entered into negotiations with the Government for their restitution. Because of the complexity of the restitution issue and seeming contradictions within the law, the return of property is seen by the Catholic Church as less recourse to the judicial system than a process of collaboration.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Many Muslims felt like second class citizens, primarily because the majority of positions in Government, information, and media services were held by Christians. For example, the Universal Church owns the Rede Miramar radio and television stations and various real estate holdings throughout the country.

Within the Muslim community, the black and South Asian communities tend to remain separate, with each group generally attending different mosques and schools. While relations between blacks and established Mozambicans of South Asian origin are generally good, cultural conflict between black communities and South Asian immigrants has led to tensions. There was controversy over the official date of the Eid al-Fitr Muslim festival; as Black Muslims choose a date based on when the full moon is sighted from anywhere within the geographical boundaries of Mozambique, whereas Asian Muslims choose a date based on when the full moon is sighted from anywhere within the country and within a much wider area outside the country. The Asian Muslim vantage points result in the full moon being sighted on a day different from the day that the Black Muslims sight it which makes the holding of Eid contentious. Despite these differences, there are signs that tensions are lessening as younger Muslims seem to recognize the need for dialogue to reconcile their 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.

NAMIBIA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 320,827 square miles and a population of 2 million. More than 90 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christian. The two largest Christian groups are the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches, while smaller numbers are affiliated with the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). There are also a number of Zionist Churches (a mixture of traditional African beliefs and Pentecostal Christianity), especially in urban areas. The Dutch Reformed Church of Namibia is predominantly made up of members of the Afrikaner ethnic group. The Himba and San

ethnic groups comprise less than 1 percent and 3 percent respectively, practice indigenous religions. Other religions that are practiced in the country include Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and the Baha'i Faith. Practitioners of these religious groups are predominantly immigrants, descendants of immigrants, or recent converts. They reside primarily in urban areas. There are few atheists in the country. Muslims, almost exclusively Sunni and comprising both citizens and foreign nationals, represent less than 1 percent of the population.

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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion, nor does the Government subsidize any particular denomination.

The Government does not formally recognize any religion. Unlike in the past, the Government and senior ruling party officials no longer emphasize the role of three Christian groups—Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic—in mobilizing political support. Since his election President Hifikepunye Pohamba has conferred with religious leaders of all persuasions, including the predominantly Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church.

There are no registration requirements for religious organizations.

The Government recognizes the holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas Day as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

NIGER

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice, as long as persons respected public order, social peace, and national unity.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 490,000 square miles and a population of approximately 14,270,000. Islam is the dominant religion and is practiced by more than 90 percent of the population. Approximately 95 percent of Muslims are Sunni and 5 percent Shi'a. There are also small communities of Christians and Baha'is. Christians, both Roman Catholics and Protestants, account for less than 5 percent of the

population and are mainly present in the regions of Maradi and Dogondoutchi, and in Niamey and other urban centers with expatriate populations. Christianity was brought with French colonial institutions, and its adherents include many local believers from the educated, the elite, and colonial families, as well as immigrants from neighboring coastal countries, particularly Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Numbering only a few thousand, Baha'is reside 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 religious beliefs. There is no reporting available regarding the number of atheists.

Foreign missionary organizations 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 respected this right in practice, although it monitors religious expression it views as potentially threatening to public order or national unity. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

No religious group was subsidized; however, the Islamic Association, which acts as an official advisory committee on religious matters to the Government, conducted biweekly broadcasts on the Government-controlled television station. Christian programming was broadcast on private and Government radio stations, although the Government stations typically broadcast it only on Sundays and on special occasions, such as Christmas and Easter.

Religious organizations must register with the Interior Ministry. 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 Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

Christmas, Easter Monday, Eid el-Adha, Muharram, Maulid al-Nabi (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), Lailatoul-Quadr, and Eid al-Fitr are recognized as national holidays. It is not uncommon for Muslims and Christians to attend each other's festivities during these holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Constitution forbids political parties from having a doctrine based on any religious ideology.

The Government does not impose religious speech restrictions as long as there is no intent to disrespect public order, social peace, and national unity. Some senior-level Government employees are required to take religious oaths. The Constitution specifies that the president of the republic, the prime minister, the president of the National Assembly, and the president of the Constitutional Court must take an oath on a holy book of their own choosing. Members of the Constitutional Court, Independent National Election Commission, and High Council for Communications must do the same.

On August 16, 2006, the Minister of Interior wrote a letter to all Islamic associations with the intent to regulate preaching in order to curb "provocative sermons likely to create disagreements among believers but also to disturb public order." According to the Minister, "it is not uncommon to hear some innuendos that overstep the prescriptions of the Qur'an and Hadiths." The letter instructed Islamic associations to inform the authorities via the Islamic Council on preachers' level of instruction as well as the dates and locations at which the preaching sessions would take place. The letter further stated that "any blunder by a member of an association may involve the individual's or organization's responsibility and be subject to appropriate sanction." While religious and civil society organizations generally agreed with the spirit of the letter, they decried the Minister's attempt to infringe upon their freedom of expression. On September 5, 2006, the Minister called a press conference to clarify his intent, calling for well organized sermons consistent with the

Islamic Council's advice. There was no indication that the clergy changed their sermons in response to the Minister's letter.

Traditional chiefs and senior Islamic clergy asserted the right to approve or disapprove of sermon content and mosque building plans by foreign Islamic preachers and donors. In practice, however, this assertion did not seem to impede Islamic preaching and mosque construction initiatives undertaken by foreign clergy and organizations. Many of these groups preached Salafi/Wahhabi-inspired doctrine that differed from the traditional Sufi teachings of the mainline clergy and chiefs.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA) was created on March 1, 2007, to foster interfaith dialogue, elicit religious viewpoints on Government policies and programs, coordinate religious organizations' humanitarian projects, and establish religious schools. The MRA intended to restructure Islamic schools, focusing on curriculums and teacher payment—the latter to address problems such as child begging and trafficking in children by some teachers. The Niger Islamic Council, an organization established in February 2006 and composed of representatives from Muslim organizations and Government agencies, reported to the MRA.

From January 24 to 27, 2007, Richard Roberts of Oral Roberts University led a high-profile Christian mission to the country. He met with senior Government officials and hosted a series of large "miracle and healing" events attended by Muslims, Christians, and others, demonstrating harmonious coexistence between religious groups in the country.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

On July 28, 2006, the police used batons and tear gas to disperse an unauthorized protest staged by a group of Muslim activists. A few protesters suffered minor injuries; none were detained. On November 26, 2006, police prevented another gathering of Muslim activists at Niamey's Grand Mosque. Both groups had assembled to protest against the ratification of the African Union protocol on women's rights, which they considered incompatible with Islamic law. On May 11 (Niger's Women's Day) and May 24, 2007, several Muslim women's associations staged protests against the Government's renewed attempt to ratify the protocol. On May 28, 2007, the Government withdrew the bill for further consultations.

SECTION IV. U.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 emphasized the importance of tolerance in its public statements and in meetings with Government officials and members of civil society.

NIGERIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. While the Government generally respected religious freedom, it occasionally placed limits on religious activity to address security and public safety concerns.

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

Interreligious tension between Christians and Muslims remained in some areas, and conflicts of a seemingly socioeconomic or political nature often divided people along religious lines. While members of Jehovah's Witnesses freely practiced their religion and were generally accepted in society, there were isolated cases of societal abuse of Witnesses who chose not to participate in local age-grade associations for religious reasons.

The U.S. Government pursued several religious freedom-related issues as an important part of the U.S. Embassy's program. The Ambassador and the Embassy assumed an active role in discussing and advocating these issues with Government, religious, civil society, and traditional leaders, and are involved in these issues countrywide. The Embassy also devoted substantial funding to projects and outreach with a religious freedom component.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 356,700 square miles and a population of 135,031,200. There are no accepted figures for the proportion of citizens who practice Islam or Christianity; it is generally assumed the numbers are roughly equal and that there is a substantial number who practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs alongside Christianity or Islam. The predominant form of Islam is Sunni, although indigenous Shi'a communities reside in isolated parts of the North as well. The Christian population includes Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and a growing number of evangelical and Pentecostal Christians and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

The North, dominated by the large Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri ethnic groups, is predominantly Muslim. However, significant Christian communities have resided and intermarried with Muslims in the North for well over 50 years. Overall, Muslims and Christians coexist peacefully, neither community segregated completely from the other except in parts of Kaduna State. Both Muslims and Christians reside in large numbers in the Middle Belt, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). In the Southwest, where the Yoruba ethnic group predominates, Christians and Muslims reside in equal numbers. While most Yorubas practice either Christianity or Islam, the practice of traditional Yoruba religious beliefs continues. Southern ethnic groups are predominantly Christian. In the East, where the Igbo ethnic group is dominant, Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists are the majority, although many Igbos continue to observe traditional rites and ceremonies in tandem with Christianity.

The Government's nationwide census released in March 2007 did not record religious or ethnic affiliation due to a great deal of controversy surrounding this issue.

Foreign missionaries from many religious groups operate freely; many have been present for a decade or longer.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Chapter 1, Section 10 of the Constitution mandates that the Government "shall not adopt any religion as State Religion." While the Government generally respected religious freedom, there were some instances in which it placed limits on religious activity to address security and public safety concerns.

The Government is a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; however, there is no state religion.

Each year the Government observes the following Islamic and Christian commemorations as national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Christmas, and Boxing Day.

There are 36 states constituting the Federal republic; governors enjoy significant autonomy in decision making but derive substantial resources subject to oversight from the Federation Account of the Government. The Constitution prohibits state and local governments from adopting or giving preferential treatment to a religious or ethnic community. Some Christians allege that the 2000 reintroduction and enforcement of criminal aspects of the Shari'a legal system and the continued use of state resources to fund the construction of mosques, the teaching of Qadis (Shari'a court judges), and subsidies for the pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj) across the 12 northern states amounted to the adoption of Islam as a de facto state religion. Moreover, the Nigerian Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) contends that the establishment of a Ministry of Religious Affairs and the creation of a Preacher's Council in Zamfara State is tantamount to adopting Islam as a state religion. However, several states, including northern states, apportioned funds to finance Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem and to construct churches. States, whether predominantly Christian or Muslim, generally responded to the religious needs expressed by the majority of their residents.

The Constitution provides that states may establish courts based on the common law or customary law systems. Individual states in the North have elected to create, alongside the common law and customary law courts, Shari'a appellate courts. Many other states, including Middle Belt states Benue and Plateau, have Shari'a appellate courts. In 2000, 12 northern states (Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Borno, Zamfara, and Gombe) reintroduced criminal law aspects of the Shari'a legal system. Prior to 2000 the courts used the Shari'a system to adjudicate civil matters only. Adherence to Shari'a criminal law is compulsory for Muslims in some states and optional in others. While the Constitution (Section 262.2 and 277.2) technically does not permit non-Muslims to consent to Shari'a jurisdiction, in practice, non-Muslims have the option of submitting to Shari'a jurisdiction when the penalty under the Shari'a is less severe, such as paying a fine rather than a jail sentence under common law. Defendants have the right to challenge the constitutionality of Shari'a criminal statutes through the common law appellate courts. As in the previous reporting period, no challenges with adequate legal standing reached the common law appellate system. The Constitution also provides for the Government to establish a Federal Shari'a Court of Appeal; however, the Government has not established such a court and has provided no justification for the delay in its establishment. The highest appellate court for the Shari'a remains the Supreme Court manned by common law judges who need not have and do not usually possess any formal training in the Shari'a.

The law requires Christian and Muslim groups planning to build new churches or mosques to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The CAC did not deny registration to any religious group during the period covered by this report. Many nascent churches and mosques ignored the registration requirement, and a small number, most notably those in the Federal Capital Territory, had their places of worship shut down or demolished when officials enforced the zoning laws.

Both Federal and state governments were involved in the regulation of mandatory religious instruction in public schools.

In June 2007 newly-elected President Umaru Yar'Adua pledged to create an interfaith advisory council consisting of prominent Muslim and Christian leaders to aid the Government in maintaining peace among its various religious communities. Some state governors, including former Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Makarfi, actively encouraged interfaith and intercommunal discussions and made advances to prevent further violence and tension. The Government encouraged the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Kano-based Inter-Ethnic Forum, the Kaduna-based Inter-Faith Mediation Center, and the Muslim/Christian Dialogue Forum. Traditional leaders, such as the Sultan of Sokoto—the communal leader of the country's 70 million Muslims—as well as various local chieftains and Emirs throughout the country took steps to minimize conflict in their communities. In advance of the April 2007 elections, the Christian Association of Nigeria and the National Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs issued joint statements exhorting adherents of the two faith communities to exercise civility and tolerance for each other, particularly at a time of heightened political unease.

On June 18, 2007, the President pledged to establish a National Hajj Commission, which would earmark Federal funding for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. The Government agreed to look into the creation of a commensurate Christian Pilgrimage Commission.

The National Broadcasting Commission requires televangelists who broadcast religious miracles to prove the authenticity of the miracles, although that rule was suspended by the Lagos High Court pending a hearing of a lawsuit contesting the policy. Some evangelists continued to reference miracles in their broadcasts.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In June 2005 the Abuja High Court struck down provisions of the Public Order Act that banned gatherings whose political, ethnic, or religious content might lead to unrest. Although several state governments continued to ban public mass-rally proselytizing to avoid ethno-religious violence, large outdoor religious gatherings were less likely to be restricted as a result of this ruling.

Although the Government did not generally restrict distribution of religious publications, it sporadically enforced a ban against broadcasting religious advertisements on state-owned radio and television stations. Private radio stations regularly broadcast religious programming.

In Zamfara State, a Shari'a court must hear all criminal cases involving Muslims. Other states, including Niger and Kano States, that utilize the Shari'a legal system permit Muslims to choose common law courts for criminal cases. Civil society groups alleged that some Qadis apply harsher penalties in adultery and fornication cases against women than in commensurate cases against men and require stronger evi-

dence to convict men than to convict women. The courts did not prosecute any known cases of adultery or fornication during the reporting period.

There are no laws barring women or any groups from testifying in common law courts or that give less weight to their testimony; however, Shari'a courts usually accord less weight to the testimony of women and non-Muslims.

The Government continued to ban religious organizations from primary school campuses, although individual students retained the right to practice their religious beliefs in registered places of worship. The Constitution does not require students to receive religious instruction in secular public schools. Nigerian NGOs such as the CLO claim that the 12 northern states have made Islamic religious education compulsory in previously secular public schools. Several state authorities claimed that schools did not require students to attend classes of a religious group other than their own, and that students could request a teacher of their own religious beliefs to provide alternative instruction. However, there were often no teachers of "Christian Religious Knowledge" in many northern schools or those of "Islamic Religious Knowledge" in some southern schools.

Christians in the predominantly Muslim northern states continued to allege that local government officials used zoning regulations to stop or slow the establishment of new churches. Muslims in the predominantly Christian southern part of Kaduna State alleged that local government officials prevented the construction of mosques. In some areas of the south, Muslims decried local governments for not approving permits to build mosques and Islamic schools. Officials responded that many of the proposed new churches and mosques would be in residential neighborhoods not zoned for religious purposes, and that the certification boards dealt with a large backlog of cases for all applicants regardless of religious belief.

Although the expanded jurisdiction of the Shari'a does not apply to non-Muslims in civil and criminal proceedings, certain social mores inspired by the Shari'a, such as the separation of the sexes in public schools and health care and transportation services have affected non-Muslim minorities in the North. Some social practices and norms precede the advent of Islam in the country.

Kano State maintains on its books steep fines and prison sentences for the public consumption and distribution of alcohol, in compliance with Shari'a stipulations proscribing public alcohol consumption. However, there were no reports of non-Muslims being penalized during the reporting period. In spite of the ban, alcohol was available in Kano at hotel bars and restaurants. In some northern states, Government officials have restricted the sale and public consumption of alcohol except on Federal Government installations, such as military and police barracks.

In Zamfara State, local governments citing religious sensibilities enforced laws requiring the separation of men and women in the transportation and health care sectors. The bans on mixed gender transportation did not appear to extend to private vehicles. The 2005 Kano State ban prohibiting commercial motorcycle taxis from taking women as passengers continued during the reporting period. The Kano State Shari'a Implementation Council cited repeated complaints by female residents of Kano as the impetus for the ban. Only Muslim women were subjected to the ban, as motorcycle taxis continued to offer rides to non-Muslim female passengers. In response to the need for adequate transport for women, Kano State purchased Indian-style motor carriages for Muslim female transport. Several other northern states and the FCT also use these carriages.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Constitution permits capital punishment; although several Shari'a courts, as well as common law courts, sentenced persons to death, no Shari'a death sentences were carried out during the period covered by this report.

The Nigeria Legal Aid Council appealed 50 Shari'a court convictions and death sentences in Bauchi State since 2004.

Muslims convicted of crimes under Shari'a received a public caning sentence for minor offenses, such as petty theft, public consumption of alcohol, and prostitution. Unlike in the past, there were no reports that states administered amputations or canings pursuant to a Shari'a court ruling during the period covered by this report. For a variety of reasons, there were numerous Shari'a cases pending appeal or implementation of sentence, including pending amputation and stoning sentences in Jigawa, Bauchi, Niger, Kano, and Zamfara states. The 2003 case involving Bauchi resident Ade Dabo, sentenced to stoning for the alleged rape of two minor females, was pending confirmation by the newly elected Bauchi State Governor. If confirmed, this case would represent the second stoning sentence carried out since Shari'a criminal punishment was reintroduced in 2000.

Human rights groups reported that many indigent persons convicted of Shari'a offenses claimed they had not known of their entitlement to legal representation.

A number of states with expanded Shari'a laws sanctioned enforcement of such laws by groups known as the Hisbah, which are funded by state governments. In some cases these groups have authority to make arrests but primarily serve as traffic wardens and help regulate commercial activity in the marketplace. The Hisbah groups were active during the period covered by this report in Zamfara, Niger, and Kano States.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. The 12 northern states that reintroduced the Shari'a criminal code did not criminalize apostasy or penalize Muslims that converted to another religion.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Interreligious tension between Christians and Muslims remained in some areas, and conflicts of a seemingly socioeconomic or political nature often divided people along religious lines. Unlike in prior reporting periods, there were no high-profile cases of community violence directed at religious groups. Events occurring in other regions or other parts of the world, particularly those of a religious tenor, heightened tensions between religious groups.

Religious differences often mirror regional, tribal-ethnic, and occupational differences. For example, in many areas of the Middle Belt, Muslim Fulani tend to be pastoralists, while the Muslim Hausa and most Christian Igbo and other ethnic groups tend to be farmers or work in urban areas. Consequently ethnic, regional, economic, and land use competition often correlate with religious differences between the competing groups.

There were unconfirmed reports of several incidents of violence directed against Christian groups.

Local religious and traditional leaders met regularly in Katsina and Borno States in response to the 2006 violence sparked by protests over caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. The region remained susceptible to religious conflict because of underlying socioeconomic problems.

In response to violence between Sunni and Shi'a communities in Sokoto State in 2005, the Sultan of Sokoto regularly counseled local religious leaders to promote coexistence among all groups.

Incidents of communal violence in Plateau State continued to occur, but not on the scale of the previous reporting period.

School authorities, with the aid of student leaders representing campus religious organizations, continued to use interfaith dialogue to address tensions that resulted from the 2004 killing of a Christian campus organization leader at a major university in Bauchi State.

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.

There were a few instances of societal abuse and discrimination against members of Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to join local age-grade associations or women's associations for religious reasons. As in the past, communities in Abia State sometimes ostracized these Witnesses, denying them the right to sell goods in the public market or to retrieve water from the public tap. At the end of the reporting period, the Director of Public Prosecution reportedly had not prosecuted persons accused of assaulting Jehovah's Witnesses (which resulted in the death of one member) who refused to join a women's association in Abia State in 2003. There were also unconfirmed reports that several communities in Abia State seized or destroyed the property of Jehovah's Witnesses who for religious reasons refused to pay a fee levied by the community for the identification of witches.

Although many non-Muslims feared that implementation of the Shari'a criminal code would change their way of life, there was little or no change in the daily lives of most non-Muslims. Some state and local governments strictly interpreted the new Shari'a laws for political reasons, but the majority interpreted and implemented their laws less stringently. There also was a trend developing among some segments of the Muslim community to shift focus away from the criminal aspects of the Shari'a legal system to its tenets of social justice and charity for the poor. Islamic scholars and many Muslim lawyers began educating the poor and the less well in-

formed about their procedural rights under Shari'a. Several lawyers offered free services to the indigent in cases with potentially severe punishments.

In the northern states, some community members reportedly pressured or ostracized Muslims that converted to another religion.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy regularly raised religious freedom issues with various Federal, state, and local officials, and with prominent citizens. The U.S. Embassy made an especially strong effort to promote religious reconciliation between Christians and Muslims. Embassy officers traveled extensively to various states to meet with Christian and Muslim leaders throughout the reporting period to further that outreach.

In an effort to increase engagement with and outreach towards northern Nigeria, where most of Nigeria's approximately 70 million Muslims reside, the U.S. Government designated and filled a new Political Officer position focused on Muslim Outreach and trained in Hausa, the lingua franca of much of the North.

RWANDA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Local government officials detained Jehovah's Witnesses for refusing to participate in security patrols, however in a smaller number of cases than during the previous reporting period.

There was an improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, as there were fewer reports of local authorities harassing and detaining members of Jehovah's Witnesses. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to experience difficulty in obtaining permission to build Kingdom Halls (places of worship) in some localities, particularly in Gitarama.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,169 square miles and a population of approximately 9 million. The Government reported on November 1, 2006, that 56.5 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 26 percent Protestant, 11.1 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 4.6 percent Muslim, 1.7 percent claims no religious affiliation, and 0.1 percent practice traditional indigenous beliefs. This study indicates a 6.9 percent increase in the number of Catholics and a 17.9 percent decline in the number of Protestants (which can in large part be explained by breaking out the growing Seventh-day Adventist church separately) from the 2001 survey figures. The figures for Protestants include the growing number of members of Jehovah's Witnesses (about 14,000) and evangelical Protestant groups. There is also a small population of Baha'is. 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 religious groups operated in the country. Foreign missionaries openly promoted their religious beliefs, and the Government welcomed their development assistance.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Constitution prohibits the formation of political organizations based on race, ethnic group, tribe, clan, region, sex, religion, or any other division that may give rise to discrimination. There is no state religion; however, the Constitution includes a provision for a ceremonial oath of office for high-level Government officials that makes reference to God.

The penal code provides for small fines and imprisonment of up to 6 months for anyone who interferes with a religious ceremony or with a religious minister in the exercise of his or her professional duties. The law regulates public meetings and calls for fines or imprisonment of violators.

Authorities suspended national registration requirements for religious groups pending passage of a new NGO law that has been under consideration in Parliament since 2003. However, NGOs, religious institutions, and religious organizations must present their objectives and plan of action to local and district authorities for "provisional agreement." At least 112 religious groups received these provisional agreements during the reporting period.

There were reports that numerous religious organizations operated without legal recognition because the process of obtaining it was arduous, which Government officials confirmed. Members of unregistered groups were vulnerable to censorship and possible detention. One religious NGO was suspended for operating without legal registration at the district level, and there appeared to be no official means of appealing suspension.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In some cases students can choose between instruction in "religion" or "morals." In the past missionaries established schools that were operated by the Government. In those schools religious instruction tended to reflect the denomination of the founders, either Catholic or Protestant. There are 12 private Muslim secondary schools, reflecting rapid recent growth in Islamic education.

The Government observes six holy days as official holidays: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Eid-al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, and Assumption.

Although there were no outward displays of animosity, there were tensions between the Government and the Catholic Church about the role of current and former church officials during the 1994 genocide. Church officials noted that, in a departure from previous ceremonies, at the 2007 genocide commemoration only the Lutheran representative was invited to offer a prayer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Officials continued to deny building permits for five Kingdom Halls to Jehovah's Witnesses in Gitarama. In May 2006 the mayor of Gitarama notified Jehovah's Witnesses representatives that they would receive permits only if they stopped "inciting citizens to disobey Government policy."

The Government requires religious groups to provide advance notification of religious meetings held at night, particularly those ceremonies involving amplified music and boisterous celebrations, due to noise concerns. Religious leaders reportedly cooperated with the Government in limiting nighttime religious meetings and did not view this 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.

Government officials presiding over wedding ceremonies generally required couples to take an oath while touching the national flag, a practice that Jehovah's Witnesses object to on religious grounds. This practice made it difficult for members to marry legally, since they had to find officials willing to perform the ceremony without the flag requirement. Some members found that placing their hands on a Bible on top of the flag was an acceptable alternative.

The Government continued the 2003 suspension of two local organizations, the "Eglise Methodiste Unie au Rwanda" (the United Methodist Church of Rwanda) and the "Communauté Methodiste Union Internationale" (the International Union Methodist Community). Both attempted to register as the primary Methodist group in the country and claimed to be the regional representative of the World Methodist Church, which includes the Rwandan, Kenyan, and Ugandan Methodist Churches. The dispute between the two organizations remained before the High Court at the end of the reporting period.

The Government also continued to suspend the registration of two Pentecostal churches led by foreign pastors. One of the pastors left the country during the reporting period; his church's suspension began in 2004, presumably because of the pastor's alleged immigration irregularities and an ongoing dispute over the naming of his church.

Unlike during prior reporting periods, there were no reports that religious groups changed their locations or tailored their activities to avoid confrontation with authorities due to the citing of religious figures and groups in the 2004 parliamentary report on genocide ideology.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were a total of 48 reports of police detaining, arresting, and in at least 1 instance beating members of Jehovah's Witnesses because the latter refused—due to religious beliefs—to participate in nighttime security patrols.

There were 26 Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned or detained by local authorities for a period of 1 night to 1 month in the last half of 2006 for failure to participate in

night patrols. In addition, in April 2007 police arrested five Witnesses in Kigali and held them for up to 2 weeks for refusing to take part in armed night patrols. Also in April, police imprisoned nine Witnesses in Gasabo district for their refusal to participate in night patrols. Despite being informed by the Jehovah's Witnesses' legal representative that they had permission from the Minister of the Interior to decline to take part in night patrols, district officials transferred them to a larger prison for 2 days until senior officials of the Ministry of the Interior intervened. Local authorities held 2 Witnesses in Rulindo District for 3 days, and 3 others in Gatumbo for up to 2 weeks. Officials briefly held three more members at the end of May. One of the three was severely beaten. In 2005 judges ruled that there was no law requiring Jehovah's Witnesses to participate in nighttime patrols.

On May 24, 2007, school authorities in Nyamasheke District expelled three Jehovah's Witnesses children. Jehovah's Witnesses leadership was working for the children's reinstatement at the end of the reporting period.

The six primary students in Nyange District who were expelled in the last reporting period for refusing to attend Christian services in their school returned to classes.

In the case of the member of Jehovah's Witnesses detained and severely beaten by the Executive Secretary of the Kirehe-Kigarame Sector in May 2006, the Government investigated and temporarily detained the official but later released him without charge.

In most districts local officials agreed to allow alternative services, such as community-building projects, in place of night patrols for members of Jehovah's Witnesses. Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Government officials often successfully mediated contentious issues.

On October 6, 2006, a court sentenced Father Jean-Marie Vianney Uwizeyeyezu, a Catholic priest who headed a parish in southern Rwanda, to 12 years in prison for "having downplayed the [1994] genocide." In May 2006 authorities arrested and detained Uwizeyeyezu after he allegedly quoted several traditional sayings during Mass that were interpreted as denial of the genocide, which is prohibited by law.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The relationship between Jehovah's Witnesses and the Government improved during the period covered by this report. Jehovah's Witnesses officials successfully engaged national and local governments on both specific cases and general issues of contention. The Government responded to reports of Jehovah's Witnesses' detention by local authorities and secured their release. However, there were occasional implementation difficulties and miscommunications between the Government and some local leaders.

There were significantly fewer reports of local authorities harassing and detaining members of Jehovah's Witnesses during the reporting period. Based on revised estimates, there were 102 reports of arrests and detentions in the previous reporting period and 48 such reports during this reporting period.

There was a decline in the number of school children expelled from classes for their religious beliefs.

Improvement in religious freedom for Jehovah's Witnesses was credited to international reporting and to the Government and Witnesses' education of local authorities about the group's beliefs.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Numerous associations and interfaith groups, such as the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Protestant Council of Rwanda, contributed to understanding and tolerance among various religious groups.

The Interfaith Commission for Rwanda continued to promote unity and reconciliation by supporting activities such as aid programs aimed at reconciling genocide survivors, released genocide prisoners, and genocide detainees' families. Mufti Saleh Habimana, the leader of the country's Muslim community, led a regional peacebuilding effort for the Horn of Africa.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Embassy officers held numerous meetings with members of the Catholic and Anglican Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, leaders of the Muslim community, and 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. As part of its ongoing engagement with the Government on human rights issues, the Embassy identified individual cases of concern to Government officials, who subsequently investigated conditions in a few local administrations and acted to improve the situation for members of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 386 square miles and a population of 160,400 (2004 estimate). The population is predominantly Roman Catholic. No official statistics are available; however, it is estimated that approximately 72 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 23 percent Protestant, 3 percent Muslim, and 2 percent atheist. Protestantism has grown considerably in recent years due to the activities of Protestant missionaries. The number of Muslims has increased due to an influx of illegal immigrants from Nigeria and Cameroon. Some syncretistic beliefs are practiced, combining indigenous traditions with Christian or Islamic beliefs.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country unhindered.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Religious organizations must register with the Government. There were no reports that any groups were denied registration or that the activities of unregistered groups were restricted.

The Government celebrates certain holy days as national holidays. These include Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy, based in Libreville, Gabon, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials regularly met with the country's Catholic bishop, Protestant church leaders, and nongovernmental organizations.

SENEGAL

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 76,000 square miles and a population of 11.9 million. According to current demographic data, Islam is the predominant religion, practiced by approximately 94 percent of the population. Most citizens practice a syncretic form of Islam, combining formal religious practices with traditional cultural beliefs and values. There also is an active Christian community (4 percent of the population) that includes Roman Catholics, Protestant denominations, and syncretic Christian-animist groups. The remaining 2 percent of the population practice exclusively traditional indigenous religious beliefs or no religion.

The country is ethnically and religiously diverse. Although there is significant integration of all groups, Christians are concentrated in the western and southern regions, while groups that practice traditional religious beliefs are mainly in the eastern and southern regions. Immigrants practice the same religious beliefs as native-born citizens.

A wide variety of 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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.

After complaints about the lack of Christians in the cabinet that took office in June 2007, President Wade appointed a second Catholic, expanding the cabinet to 38 members.

The Government provides direct financial and material assistance to religious organizations, primarily to maintain or rehabilitate places of worship or underwrite special events. All religious groups have access to these funds, and there is often competition among religious groups to gain them.

The Government observes a number of Islamic and Christian holy days, including Tabaski, Tamkharit, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Korite for Muslims, and Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, and Christmas for Christians.

Religious organizations are independent of the Government and administer their affairs without Government interference. Civil and commercial code requires any group, religious or otherwise, to register with the Minister of the Interior to acquire legal status as an association. Registration enables an association to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, and receive financial contributions from private sources. Registered religious groups, including all registered nonprofit organizations, are exempt from many forms of taxation. Registration generally is granted, and the Minister of Interior must have a legal basis for refusing registration.

Missionaries, like other long-term visitors, must obtain residence visas from the Ministry of Interior. Missionary groups often established a presence as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Religious NGOs obtain permission to operate from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Social Development. 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.

The Government allows for 4 hours of religious education per week in state-owned elementary schools. The religion taught is based on demand from parents, whether Christian or Muslim. An estimated 365,000 students participated in this program across the country.

Privately owned schools are free to provide religious education. The Ministry of Education provides funds to schools operated by religious institutions that meet national education standards. Christian schools, which have a long and successful experience in education, received the largest share of this Government funding. The majority of students attending Christian schools are Muslims. Religious charities also received Government support.

The Government also operates Islamic schools, which are growing in popularity and include an estimated 20,000 students. In these schools, students learn French and Arabic. These programs are designed to attract children from rudimentary schools that require students to memorize the Qur'an but otherwise do not offer marketable skills.

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. During the period covered by this report, the Government provided hundreds of free plane tickets to Muslim and Christian citizens to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca or to Rome and the Holy Land.

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 consulted with religious leaders, and the Government generally was represented at all major religious festivals or events. In May 2006 the Government hosted the U.N. High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations during which President Wade called for the group to endorse the Islamic-Christian Dialogue scheduled for March 2008 in order to combat prejudice and misunderstanding.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Majority and minority religious leaders conducted their activities and spoke out on social and political issues, such as political violence and HIV/AIDS, without fear of Government sanction. Religious groups, including both Muslims and Christians, had wide access to public media to promote religious activities, such as preaching and religious education. The Government monitored foreign missionary groups and religious NGOs to ensure that their activities coincide with their stated objectives.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Religion plays an important role in the lives of most citizens, and society generally was very open to and tolerant of different religious groups. The country has a long tradition of friendly coexistence between the Muslim majority and Christian, traditional indigenous, and other religious minorities. Interfaith marriage was relatively common. Within certain families, other religious beliefs, such as Christianity or a traditional indigenous religion, were practiced alongside Islam. There were a number of interfaith events throughout the year that celebrate the important role of religion in everyday life.

While the organized Islamic communities (called brotherhoods) were not generally involved directly in politics or Government affairs, these groups exerted considerable influence in society and maintained dialogue with political leaders. In the early 2007 election campaign, one prominent leader closely associated with the Mouride Brotherhood, Cheikh Bethio Thioune, campaigned for President Wade. Also in Janu-

ary 2007 the spokesman of the Tidjane Brotherhood, Serigne Abdoul Aziz Sy al Ibn, arranged reconciliation meetings between President Wade and his former prime minister, Idrissa Seck. Close association with a brotherhood, as with any influential community leader, religious or secular, afforded certain political and economic protections and advantages that were not conferred by law.

As in prior years, Christian and Muslim leaders continued to maintain a public dialogue. In December 2006 Archbishop of Dakar Theodore Adrien Sarr and Serigne Abdoul Aziz Sy al Ibn presided over a forum organized by Rencontre Africaine pour la Defense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO), one of the leading human rights groups in the country. The forum, called "Pacte Republicain," sought to promote social dialogue and prevent political violence. In early February 2007 Archbishop Sarr and other members of the Catholic hierarchy successfully persuaded the opposition to avoid a violent confrontation with the Government on the eve of the presidential election campaign. In March 2007 the Archbishop met with Thierno Habibou Tall, another Muslim religious leader. The two reiterated their commitment to the promotion of interfaith dialogue.

During the period covered by this report, Protestant groups became more active throughout the country, a sign, according to one prominent local NGO, of the religious tolerance practiced in the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and maintains relations with all major religious groups, including the Mouride, Tidiane, Layanne, and Qadriyya Islamic brotherhoods and Christian groups. The Embassy maintained contacts with several faith-based NGOs, foreign missionary groups, and human rights organizations and activists to monitor issues of religious freedom. The U.S. Ambassador or her representative regularly attended major annual religious festivals or gatherings to promote an open dialogue with various religious groups.

The Embassy has an active program of presenting information about religious diversity and tolerance in the United States. The Embassy routinely released information on Islam in the United States, including statements from the President and the Secretary of State celebrating Ramadan and other Islamic holidays, to the local press, posted on its Web site and published through a monthly magazine.

SEYCHELLES

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 444 square miles and a population of 83,000. The 2002 Government census estimated that 82 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent is Anglican. There are other Christian groups, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assembly, Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hinduism, Islam, and Baha'i also have adherents within the country.

Foreign missionary groups 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

The Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, mosques, and the Baha'i local spiritual assembly have individual acts of incorporation. Other religious groups that are not corporate bodies are registered as associations with the Registrar General and are entitled to tax-free privileges, similar to a charity. Twenty-five religious organizations were registered with the Registrar of Association. All religious organizations must register to be entitled to tax-free privileges. If an organization does not want such 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 alternate Sunday mornings, the national radio service airs Catholic Mass and Anglican services, which last from 1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. The Muslim and Hindu groups are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Friday afternoon, and the Baha'is and Seventh-day Adventists are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Saturday afternoon.

Government employees of all religious backgrounds can request paid leave on any of their holy days, and such leave usually is granted. The Islamic Society of Seychelles generally submits requests to the Department of Public Administration for Muslim employees to receive leave on Islamic festival days.

The majority of Government ministers are Catholic.

The Government assisted a number of religious groups during the reporting period by providing grants to assist in renovation of churches.

The Catholic holy days of Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception Day, and Christmas are national holidays. There are no non-Christian holy days that are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Government introduced an amendment to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act (BTA) that prevents political parties and religious groups from obtaining radio licenses. The original BTA allowed religious groups to obtain radio licenses. The amendment to the BTA was approved by the National Assembly on October 3 and incorporated into law on October 16, 2006.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.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 respected this right in practice.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote 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 29,925 square miles and a population of approximately 5 million. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC) estimated that 60 percent of the popu-

lation is Muslim, 20 to 30 percent Christian, and 5 to 10 percent indigenous and other religious beliefs. There are small numbers of Baha'is, Hindus, and Jews. There was no information concerning the number of atheists in the country.

Many citizens practiced a mixture of Islam and traditional indigenous religious beliefs or Christianity and traditional indigenous beliefs.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians have been located in the south; however, the 11-year civil war, which officially was declared over in 2002, resulted in movement by major segments of the population.

There are a 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Holy days celebrated as national holidays include the Islamic Eid al-Adha, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr holidays, and the Christian Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas holidays.

The Government has no requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

The Government permits religious instruction in all schools. Students may choose whether to attend the religious knowledge classes offered by the school.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. The IRC, composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, played a vital role in civil society and actively participated in efforts to further the peace process in the country and the subregion. Christian and Muslim leaders worked together with the National Accountability Group and the Anti-Corruption Commission to address the problem of corruption in society. As in the previous reporting period, membership applications from Baha'i and Jewish representatives to the IRC were still pending, as the council did not decide what procedure it would use to register new members. The Jewish group's leader was reported to have died of natural causes in November 2006.

Unlike the previous reporting period, there were no known violations of religious freedom, discrimination based on religion, or violence against persons or property based on 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. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain frequent contact with the IRC and its individual members.

SOMALIA

While the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Charter, article 15 states that "All citizens of the Somali Republic are equal before the law . . . have the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without distinction of race, birth, language, religion, sex or political affiliation," 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.

Extremist groups and individuals previously affiliated with the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), particularly Hassan Abdullah "al-Turki" in the Lower Jubba region, at times attempted to impose a strict interpretation of Shari'a law that conflicted with cultural traditions.

The U.S. Government does not maintain an official presence in the country. The lack of diplomatic representation limited the ability of the U.S. Government to take action to promote religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 246,200 square miles and a population of approximately 8.3 million; however, population figures are difficult to estimate due to the instability of the country. Citizens are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims of a Sufi tradition. There also is a small, extremely low-profile Christian community, in addition of small numbers of followers of other religions. The number of adherents to strains of conservative Islam and the number of Islamic schools supported by religiously conservative sources continue to grow.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The TFG Charter, article 15 states that "All citizens of the Somali Republic are equal before the law . . . have the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without distinction of race, birth, language, religion, sex or political affiliation."

While the Charter does not possess a section which limits or protects religious practice, article 71(2) decrees that the 1960 Somalia Constitution and other national laws shall apply "in respect of all matters not covered and not inconsistent with this Charter." The 1960 Somalia Constitution, article 29 states, "Every person has the right to freedom of conscience and to freely profess his own religion and to worship it subject to any limitations which may be prescribed by law for the purpose of safeguarding morals, public health, [and] order."

The nascent central Government is able to exercise control over very limited territory. Following internationally mediated negotiations in Kenya in 2004, a 5-year transitional process was established, which included drafting a charter, establishment of transitional Federal institutions, and a TFG. The TFG formally began operating in Baidoa in February 2006. Deep divisions within the transitional institutions continued to hamper progress on governance, but regular meetings of Parliament and a portion of the Cabinet began to take place. After the defeat of the UIC, the president of the TFG declared a state of emergency on January 31, 2007 and officially moved the seat of Government to Mogadishu on March 13, 2007. The northern region of Somaliland does not recognize the Charter or the transitional process, and is seeking recognition as an independent nation.

The Charter establishes Islam as the national religion. Several sheikhs have publicly urged the TFG to reflect a commitment to Islamic governance and morals. Some local administrations, including the self-declared "Republic of Somaliland" and the semi-autonomous region of Puntland, have made Islam the official religion in their regions; however, regional authorities generally do not espouse rhetoric against non-Muslims. Puntland security forces monitored religious activities very closely. Article 6.3 of the Puntland Charter prohibits torture "unless sentenced by Islamic Shari'a Courts in accordance with Islamic Shari'a law." The judiciary in most regions relies on some combination of Shari'a, traditional and customary law (Xeer), and the penal code of the pre-1991 Siad Barre Government.

In Somaliland religious schools and places of worship are required to obtain the Ministry of Religion's permission to operate. There are a significant number of externally funded madrassahs throughout the country. These schools provide inexpensive basic education but adhere to conservative Islamic practices. 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 Al-Islah, an Islamic organization.

The Ministry must approve entry visas for religious groups, and certain unspecified doctrines are socially prohibited. Religious practices outside of Islam by ethnic Somalis are not culturally acceptable. In Puntland religious schools and places of worship must receive permission to operate from the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Proselytizing for any religion except Islam is prohibited in Puntland and Somaliland and effectively blocked by informal social consensus elsewhere in the

country. Christian-based international relief organizations generally operated without interference, provided that they refrained from proselytizing.

On May 8, 2007, TFG forces confiscated face veils from women in Mogadishu and subsequently burned the veils. TFG authorities stated that hooded criminals disguised as women had participated in attacks against security forces, which warranted banning of the face veil within the capital. Following a public outcry, the mayor of Mogadishu denied any responsibility for the ban and called for its immediate suspension.

There were no reports religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of U.S. minors who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Non-Sunni Muslims were often viewed with suspicion by members of the Sunni majority. Non-Muslims who practiced their religion openly faced occasional societal harassment. Although not legally prohibited, conversion from Islam to another religion is socially unacceptable. Those suspected of conversion faced harassment or even death.

On May 11, 2007, Islamist Web sites attributed the kidnapping of two aid workers in Puntland to the aid workers having allegedly used the provision of assistance as a pretext for proselytizing. Similar claims were made against Ethiopians who the Islamists have stated were attempting to Christianize the country as part of their military occupation.

Local Shari'a courts, which often implement a combination of Shari'a and Somali customary law, continued to operate throughout the country in the absence of a national judicial system operated by a central Government. In 2006 the UIC and the Shari'a courts throughout Mogadishu and areas southeast of Mogadishu asserted their authority and enforced a conservative interpretation of Islamic practices and Shari'a. In October 2006 the UIC called for jihad against Ethiopia for supporting the TFG and appealed to international jihadists to come to its aid.

Media reports indicate that on December 6, 2006, Sheikh Hussein Barre, then chairman of the UIC in Bula Burte, a town approximately 130 miles northeast of Mogadishu, threatened to behead any residents who failed to pray five times a day. Hussein also decreed that all shops should close, and he warned people against idling on town streets during prayer times. There were no reports that this declaration was enforced.

On September 17, 2006, Leonella Sgorbati, an Italian nun, was killed at a hospital in Mogadishu by gunmen, hours after a leading Muslim cleric, Sheikh Abukar Hassan, condemned Pope Benedict XVI for his remarks on Islam and violence. Hassan declared, "Whoever offends our Prophet Muhammad should be killed on the spot by the nearest Muslim."

Some residents in Mogadishu objected to strict interpretations of Islamic law imposed by the UIC that forbid many forms of entertainment, such as the screening of movies or soccer matches. In one instance a Shari'a court reportedly ordered one group of youths to have their heads shaved and be flogged for protesting a ban on public broadcasts of World Cup soccer matches. The UIC imposed media restrictions and warned the media against disseminating information critical of Islam. There is strong societal pressure to respect traditions which reflect the traditional Somali interpretation of Sufi Islam.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government does not maintain a diplomatic presence, and travel to the country by U.S. Government officials is restricted. The central Government remained too weak to adequately engage on issues of religious freedom; regional and self-proclaimed authorities were unresponsive due to the lack of U.S. diplomatic recognition of or representation to them. These restraints limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom in the country.

SOUTH AFRICA

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

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 470,693 square miles, and a population of 47.4 million. The 2001 religious demography census estimated that 80 percent of the population is Christian. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and adherents of traditional African beliefs constitute 4 percent of the population. Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated that it belongs to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation.

The African Independent Churches are the largest group of Christian churches. There are more than 4,000 of these churches, with a membership of more than 10 million, constituting approximately 26 percent of the total Christian population. Although these churches were founded as breakaways from 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 Zionist Christian Church is the largest African Independent Church with 11.1 percent of the population. The African Independent Churches attract practitioners in both rural and urban areas.

Other Christian churches include the Dutch Reformed family of churches, which comprise 6.7 percent of the population, the Roman Catholic Church, which comprises 7.1 percent, and Methodists 6.8 percent. Protestant denominations include Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches. The largest traditional Pentecostal churches are the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. In recent years a number of charismatic churches have been established. Their subsidiary churches, together with those of the Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria, are grouped in the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. The Greek Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist churches are also active.

Approximately 15 percent of the population claims no affiliation with any formal religious organization. It is believed that many of these persons adhere to indigenous religions. Followers of indigenous religions believe that certain practitioners may manipulate the power of spirits using herbs, therapeutic techniques, or supernatural powers. Some practitioners are considered witches and may engender fear. Many persons combine Christian and indigenous religious practices.

Missionaries operate within the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Bill of Rights prohibits the Government from unfairly discriminating directly or indirectly against anyone based on religion, and it states that persons belonging to a religious community may not be denied the right to practice their religion and to form, join, and maintain religious associations with other members of that community. Cases of discrimination against a person on the grounds of religious freedom may be taken to the Constitutional Court.

While Christianity is the dominant religion, the law does not recognize a state religion, and the Constitution is deliberately religion-neutral. Leading Government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths, including various Christian groups, Islam, and Judaism. Many are atheists or practice no established religion.

Only Christian holy days, such as Christmas and Good Friday, are recognized as national religious holidays; however, members of other religious groups are allowed to celebrate their religious holidays without Government interference.

The Government allows, but does not require, "religion education" in public schools; however, "religious instruction," or the advocating of tenets of a particular religious group, is not permitted in public schools.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered. Religious groups can qualify as Public Benefit Organizations exempt from income tax.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

While there were no reported cases of violent physical abuse attributable to anti-Semitism, there were limited instances of anti-Semitic verbal assaults and vandalism of Jewish property and institutions. In December 2006 a Member of Parliament from the African National Congress (ANC) spoke at an academic conference at the University of South Africa in Pretoria during which he stated that the notoriously anti-Semitic Czarist forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, was a reliable historical document. Another delegate to the conference expressed doubt as to whether the Holocaust was real and reiterated Iranian President Ahmadinejad's claim that the Holocaust was a "myth." Following the conference, ANC spokesman Smuts Ngonyama stated that the ANC's position was that the Nazi genocide should be "condemned with the contempt it deserves."

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There are many ecumenical and interdenominational organizations among the various churches. The largest of these is the South African Council of Churches, 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 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 Catholic Church's relationship with other churches continued to become more open, and it worked closely with other churches on the socio-political front.

There continued to be reports of killings of purported practitioners of witchcraft. In November 2006 the killer of five persons accused of bewitching one of the killer's relatives was sentenced to five life sentences by the Pietermaritzberg High Court. In September 2006 a family of three was burned to death in Limpopo Province in an incident police identified as "witchcraft-related." The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. In Eastern Cape Province, a woman died after an angry mob stoned her. She allegedly told a man she had bewitched his wife. No arrests had been made, but police stated the investigation continued.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

In November 2006 the U.S. Ambassador hosted an Interfaith Youth Evening at his Cape Town residence. Approximately 18 youth activists participated, representing Muslim, Catholic, Anglican, Hindu, and Jewish communities. During this event, the youth exchanged views with the Ambassador on numerous subjects, including religious tolerance, the war on terror/war in Iraq, and life in America. The Johannesburg consulate staff represented the Mission at an iftar dinner promoting religious tolerance hosted by the area's Inter-Faith Dialogue Group. Consulate staff who spoke at the event urged mutual tolerance and understanding among persons of different faiths.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Mission sponsored several South Africans to the United States on International Visitor programs related to promoting religious tolerance. The nominated individuals represented a wide range of institutions, including Channel Islam, the Roshnee Islamic Institute, Desmond Tutu Diversity Trust, and Voice Islamic Radio Station. Consulate General Johannesburg organized a roundtable meeting on "Religious Tolerance and Multi-Faith Co-existence in the United States." with representatives from Muslim organizations with one of the exchange participants.

During this reporting period, the Consul General in Durban delivered remarks at an Interfaith Prayer Service hosted by eThekwini Municipality in Durban. Consulate officials also met with a variety of religious leaders, including the Roman

Catholic archbishop and bishops, the Anglican bishop, leaders of independent Christian churches, Jewish groups, and prominent Muslims in KwaZulu-Natal. The focus during these events was the promotion of religious toleration.

In September 2006 the Consul General hosted a pre-Ramadan dinner for various Muslim contacts in the education, health, and religious sectors, which provided an opportunity for discussion about the need for greater religious toleration. Two Muslim students within the Durban consular district were nominated for Fulbright Fellowships.

The Cape Town Consulate continued its active support of the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative (CTII). The CTII brings together Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, African Traditionalists and Adventists. In 2006, the Consulate arranged for Senator Barack Obama to participate in an interfaith discussion on reconciliation and tolerance with CTII.

SUDAN

The 2005 Interim National Constitution (INC) provides for freedom of religion throughout the entire country, and there was some improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom in parts of the country in the period covered by this report. However, regional distinctions in the INC negotiated as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) have resulted in disparities in the treatment of religious minorities in the North and South. The INC preserves Shari'a as a source of legislation in the North, while the Constitution of Southern Sudan establishes "the traditional laws, religious beliefs, values, and customary practices of the people" as a source of legislation in the South.

Whereas the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) generally respected the rights of Christians and Muslims in the 10 states of the South as provided for in its separate 2005 Constitution of Southern Sudan, the Government of National Unity (GNU) continued to place restrictions on Christians in the North. The National Congress Party (NCP) that dominates the GNU embraces Islam as the basis for the country's laws, institutions, and policies.

The ongoing conflict in Darfur between the Government-backed Arab Muslim militias (janjaweed) and non-Arab Muslim rebels does not center on religious differences but rather on political, economic, and ethnic issues. The United States declared the situation in Darfur a genocide in September 2004.

In February 2007 the President established the Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the National Capital, a CPA mechanism for protecting religious freedom, by appointing the commission's chairperson. In addition, there were noted improvements in the number of building permits issued for churches. Dialogue between Christian and Muslim groups continued under the auspices of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) supported by the GNU, and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), comprising Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant groups.

The country is in political transition, with national elections scheduled for 2009 and a referendum on independence for the South scheduled for 2011.

The U.S. Government promoted religious freedom and human rights in its discussions with Government officials and in its public diplomacy.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 967,500 square miles and a population of 41.2 million. Population and demographic data are estimated, and there are no recent census figures. Two-thirds to three-fourths of the population live in the 15 states of the North and are generally from Arabic-speaking Semitic groups. The remaining one-fourth to one-third of the population live in the South and are mostly Nilotic peoples. Large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fled from the South to the North during the long civil war, many of them Christians or practitioners of traditional religious beliefs. Although several hundred-thousand returned to the South after the CPA, many more still live in and around northern cities.

Islam predominates in the North, while traditional indigenous beliefs (animism) and Christianity are prevalent in the South. Some Muslim leaders estimate the Muslim population to be more than 32 million, or above 80 percent of the total population. Almost all Muslims are Sunni, although there are significant distinctions between followers of different Sunni traditions, particularly among Sufi brotherhoods. Two popular brotherhoods, the Ansar and the Khatmia, are associated with the op-

position Umma and Democratic Unionist Parties, respectively. There is a small Shi'a community.

Traditionalists are believed to be the second largest religious group in the country, although there are reports that many converted to Christianity or followed a syncretic form of these two religious beliefs.

Christians are generally considered the third largest group. The Roman Catholic Church estimates the number of baptized Catholics at six million, including small Melkite and Maronite communities in the north. Anglicans estimate five million followers in the Episcopal Church of Sudan and the dissident Reformed Episcopal Church. There are very small but long established groups of Orthodox Christians in Khartoum and other northern cities, including Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians. There are also Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities in Khartoum and eastern Sudan, largely made up of refugees and migrants. Other Christian groups with smaller followings in the country include the Africa Inland Church, the Armenian (Apostolic) Church, the Sudan Church of Christ, the Sudan Interior Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Sudan Pentecostal Church, the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (in the North), the Presbyterian Church of the Sudan (in the South), and the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Sudan.

Foreign missionary groups operate in both North and South, although Christian missionary activity is limited in the North due to Shari'a, strong social pressure against proselytizing, and existing laws against apostasy.

Many Christians in the North are descended from pre-Islamic era communities or are trading families that immigrated from Egypt or the Near East before independence (1956). Many Muslims in the South are shopkeepers or small business owners who sought economic opportunities during the civil war. Political tensions have created not only a sense of ethnic and religious marginalization among the minority religious group in each region but also a feeling among the majority that the minority groups control a disproportionate share of the wealth.

Religious identity plays a role in the country's political divisions. Northern Muslims have dominated the country's political and economic system since independence. The NCP draws much of its support from Islamists, Salafis/Wahhabis, and other conservative Arab Muslims in the North. The Umma Party has traditionally attracted Arab followers of the Ansar Sect of Sufism as well as non-Arab Muslims from Darfur and Kordofan. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) includes both Arab and non-Arab Muslims in the North and East, especially those in the Khatmia Sufi brotherhood, as well as some northern Arabic-speaking Christians. Southern Christians generally support the SPLM or one of the smaller southern parties.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Religious groups are required by law to register with the Government as NGOs, although this requirement did not appear to be enforced. Religious organizations must register as nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations to claim exemption from taxes and import duties; however, some registered Christian groups were required to pay taxes and import duties. Some of the largest Christian religious groups have historically refused to register out of fear of Government interference. The March 2006 Organization of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act requires all foreign NGOs, including religious groups, to register with the Government. The act requires Government approval before NGOs can begin work on particular projects and places restrictions on the acceptance of foreign money operating in the country. In March 2007 the GNU and the United Nations signed a Joint Communiqué designed to ease restrictions on humanitarian access to Darfur, including access by religious groups providing humanitarian assistance. The GNU has demonstrated varying levels of commitment to the provisions outlined in the Joint Communiqué.

The CPA mandated the creation of the Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the National Capital, a mechanism designed to advise the courts on how to fairly apply Shari'a to non-Muslims. In February 2007 the President appointed the commission's chairperson, who then selected 28 commissioners from the judiciary, the Ministry of Justice, and representatives from Islam, Christianity, and traditional religious groups. The commission met once and had no significant impact on religious freedom during the reporting period.

There are no restrictions on religious groups' ability to acquire property, but all groups are required to obtain permits from the national Ministry of Guidance and Endowments, the state Ministry of Construction and Planning, and the local planning office before constructing new houses of worship. This requirement did not appear to be enforced in the South; enforcement in the North was sporadic. Permits for new mosques in the North are generally issued, although Muslim leaders com-

plained the process was cumbersome and time-consuming. In the past, permits for new churches have been either denied outright or delayed for years. However, the Khartoum State Ministry of Planning and Public Utilities issued permits for three new churches since July 2005, the first permits issued for new churches since 1975. Many Christian leaders remained skeptical that the Government would allow new churches to be built.

National Government offices and businesses in the North follow the Islamic workweek, with Friday as a day of prayer. Employers are required by law to give their Christian employees 2 hours before 10:00 a.m. on Sunday for religious purposes; in practice, many employers did not, and there was no legal remedy. Public schools are in session on Sunday and Christian students are not excused from classes. Most Christians instead worship on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday evenings.

GOSS offices and businesses in the South follow the Monday through Friday workweek, with Sunday as a day of religious observance. Employers in the South generally do not give their Muslim employees 2 hours on Friday for religious purposes as required under national law practiced in the North. Schools in the South are in session on Friday, and Muslim students are not excused from class.

The Government recognizes Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Orthodox Easter, Sham El Naseem/Easter Monday, Israa Wal Mi'Raaj, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas as public holidays throughout the country. In the South, Islamic holy days were generally not observed by Government offices.

Foreign missionary groups are required to register with the Government, although Christian leaders charged that foreign Muslim groups are routinely exempt from this regulation.

Under the state-mandated curriculum, all schools in the North—including private schools operated by Christian groups—are required to teach Islamic education classes from preschool through university. All classes must be taught in Arabic, although English may be taught as a foreign language. Some public schools excuse non-Muslims from Islamic education classes, but others do not. Private schools must hire a special teacher for teaching Islamic education, although public schools are not required to provide any religious instruction to non-Muslims. According to the SIRC, the Government does not have an accreditation system in place for Christian school teachers that teach Christian doctrine to non-Muslim children. Whereas their Muslim counterparts are approved by the state, those that instruct students in Christian theology are not required to be state certified, and there appeared to be minimal Government concern about the lack of accreditation. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were two Christian schools with license applications pending before the Government.

The educational system in the South still suffered from the effects of the civil war. There were few public schools; most instruction was provided by Christian religious groups, although there were two Islamic colleges. The University of Juba, which relocated to Khartoum during the North-South Civil War, remained in the capital, although a majority of its students came from the South. The SIRC noted that some schools in predominantly Muslim areas of White Nile and Kordofan states are taught with a Christian curriculum.

The GNU has supported interfaith dialogue through the SIRC; however, the SIRC was relatively inactive during the reporting period.

The INC and the Constitution of Southern Sudan both deny recognition to any political party that discriminates on the basis of religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Obtaining permits to build new houses of worship remained a long and tortuous process, despite past improvements. In addition, the GNU pressured existing churches and Christian facilities in central Khartoum to move to less conspicuous locations on the outskirts of the capital. Some Christians believed this approach to be a less public, less confrontational alternative to the previous Government's practice of confiscating church property.

The GNU promoted Islam through mandatory Islamic education for all students in the North, even non-Muslims enrolled in private, Christian schools. Christian leaders believed that these requirements exacerbated problems in the relationship between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority and further marginalized the place of Christianity in northern society. The Catholic Church in particular faced a shortage of priests, which it attributed to a lack of Christian religious education.

In prior reporting periods, the Government restricted conversions from Islam to other religious groups; however, there were no incidents recorded during this reporting period.

The GOSS pursued policies that contributed to the free practice of religion during the period covered by this report, although some Muslims leaders in the South expressed concerns about the Government's treatment of Muslims. Although the government of Upper Nile State in January 2006 banned the use of public loudspeakers at mosques in Malakal and Nasir for announcing the call to prayer, claiming that they disturbed the public, the local government was reviewing a request to reinstate their use.

The Government favored Muslims over Christians in the North. Many southern Christians living in the North suffered from social, educational, and job discrimination, although religion was only one of the many factors leading to discrimination. Muslim religious organizations affiliated with opposition political parties, such as Al-Ansar and its political wing, the Umma National Party, also claimed to suffer discrimination by Islamists in the governing NCP, although it was unclear whether the alleged discrimination was due to religious or political affiliation. In prior reporting periods, some Muslims in the North also complained that the GNU was attempting to curry favor with the West by placing Christian leaders in positions of power within the Government.

Muslims in the South complained of economic discrimination and boycotts by Christians, although such actions did not appear to be supported by the GOSS. For example, the SPLM issued statements against violence towards Muslims in the aftermath of societal violence directed towards Muslims in Juba following the death of First Vice President John Garang in August 2005. Tensions remained in Juba as many Muslims reported continuing harassment and intimidation.

In the last 2 years the Government issued a total of 3 permits for new churches in suburban Khartoum; church officials considered these 3 permits to be an important development, as permits are not routinely approved. Most existing churches in the capital date from the colonial era, are located near the city center, and cannot accommodate Christians who live in the IDP camps on the outskirts of Khartoum. Even when employers observe the requirement to allow 2 hours of worship time on Sunday mornings, relatively few Christians have the time or means to travel more than 20 miles to church. This policy not only limits the ability of Christians to practice their faith but also enables the Government to claim that new churches are not needed because the existing ones are under-utilized.

In prior reporting periods, the Government condemned and destroyed Christian "prayer houses" that were built in IDP camps in the North without obtaining permits. The Catholic Church also built "activity centers" near IDP camps which function as churches without official permits.

Although the Government has issued three permits for new churches in suburban Khartoum, some Christian leaders believed the GNU has continued the previous regime's attempts to drive churches and other Christian institutions out of the capital's center.

Despite expectations by Christian groups in the South that the GOSS would return (or pay for) church property seized by earlier governments, there was no indication that the GOSS would do so anytime soon, as the GOSS experienced a significant financial crisis during the reporting period.

As in previous reporting periods, the local government in Khartoum attempted to take advantage of a profitable real estate market by offering a high purchase price for churches with the intent of redeveloping the area while denying churches the right to redevelop it for profit on their own, or rezoning church land for commercial use to prevent future church construction on that site.

Although there is no penalty for converting from another religion to Islam, converting from Islam to another religion is punishable by death in the North. This practice has never been carried out by the current Government. Muslims in the North who attempt to convert to another faith, however, are generally regarded as outcasts by their families and face severe social pressure to recant.

The INC and the Constitution of Southern Sudan specifically prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion for candidates for the National Civil Service, although Muslims have traditionally been chosen for these positions over Christians. However, since 2005 there has been a marked increase in the number of Christian members in the National Assembly, the Council of States, and Cabinet. There are many Christian lawyers in the North and several Christian judges for civil law cases involving non-Muslims.

The National Intelligence and Security Service routinely monitored religious activities at mosques and churches throughout the country, often posing as members of the congregations. Christian leaders acknowledged that they usually refrain from preaching on political or other sensitive topics to avoid harassment by the authorities, although some Christian leaders used the CPA as a vehicle for religious in-

struction and a point of common understanding among congregants. Some Muslim imams avoided political topics in their preaching as well.

Proselytizing by any religious group in the country is not prohibited, although strong Muslim social pressures in the North against proselytizing and Shari'a apostasy penalties within the North's legal code effectively limited Christian missionary activities in the region. Some foreign missionary groups operated in the North, although their work was officially limited to education or services to southern Christian IDPs. Missionaries continued to operate in the South, running relief operations, medical clinics, and churches. Many Western Christian religious workers experienced delays in getting visas, although this is common for almost all visa applicants from Western countries. The Government also controlled travel to certain areas in the North by requiring all foreigners to have travel permits.

There are no formal prohibitions on the local publication, importation, or dissemination of religious texts, and copies of the Qur'an and Bible are commonly available throughout the country, both North and South. Newspapers commonly print sermons and other religious articles, and the Episcopal Church of Sudan operates a religious bookstore in central Khartoum. However, newspaper editors continued to self-censor articles on controversial religious topics.

Public preaching and processions were allowed throughout the country. Muslim sermons were commonly broadcast over loudspeakers in the North and could be heard well outside the walls of mosques. However, Christian leaders said that they were cautious about preaching outside of their churches or leading public processions; they usually limited these activities to Christmas and Easter celebrations.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On January 1, 2007, police raided the seat of the Episcopal Church of Sudan Diocese of Khartoum with tear gas, injuring six worshippers. The raid occurred during an annual prayer service to mark the coming of the New Year and marked the first time since the signing of the 2005 CPA that authorities in Sudan have disrupted a religious gathering.

In May 2006 officers of the National Intelligence and Security Service detained and beat Christian leaders who met with a Muslim woman who wanted to convert to Christianity. The Government did not charge the woman with apostasy, and she returned to her family.

Forced Religious Conversion

Although there was no evidence of forced conversions in the period covered by this report, there is considerable social pressure for non-Muslims in the North to convert to Islam. The President frequently ended his public speeches with a call for victory over the "infidels," and state media outlets routinely referred to Christians as "nonbelievers." Christian parents reported that their children enrolled in public school were commonly asked why they were not Muslims.

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

There was some improvement in respect for religious freedom in the period covered by this report. The 2005 adoption of the INC and the Constitution of Southern Sudan continued to improve Government and societal acceptance of minority religious groups in both the North and the South. The February 2007 appointment of the Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the National Capital fulfilled a key commitment by the GNU to address religious freedom violations in the North; however, the Commission was established late, only convened once, and did not implement any decisions or rulings during the reporting period.

There was little Christian media programming in the North, and little local broadcasting of any kind in the South. However, the GNU permitted 24 hours of Christian broadcasting on Khartoum television on Christmas Day 2006. This was the first time such programming had been permitted, reaching a broadcast area of about 30 miles around Khartoum.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Religious identity is an important cultural marker in society, often overlapping with other racial, ethnic, and linguistic traits. Relations between individuals of different religious backgrounds were often good on a personal level, although Government policy in the past frequently undermined an atmosphere of religious tolerance by favoring certain religious or ethnic groups to the detriment of others. The signing

of the CPA and the adoption of the INC marked a change in these policies and contributed to improved relations between Muslims and Christians.

In September 2006 Mohamed Taha, the Shi'a editor-in-chief of *Al Wafaq* daily newspaper, was found decapitated on a street in Khartoum. Although there were no arrests made in the killing, there was widespread speculation that he was murdered by religious extremists who opposed his decision to republish a contentious article about the origins of the Prophet Muhammad the previous year. In May 2005 Taha had faced criminal charges of defaming religion for publishing the article but was later acquitted.

Muslims in the North who express an interest in Christianity or convert to Christianity face severe social pressure to recant. Muslim converts to Christianity are typically regarded as outcasts by their families and are sometimes forced to flee the country. Some Christian converts fear their Muslim families will beat them or report them to authorities for prosecution, although others note that many Muslim families are too embarrassed to draw public attention to the matter.

Although the social pressure for women to wear headscarves in public in the North has decreased, social pressure remained for both Muslim and non-Muslim women in universities to wear headscarves to classes.

As in the past, the SIRC played a role in promoting interreligious dialogue and understanding; however, it was less active during this reporting period than previously. Although the SIRC is officially an NGO, it received much of its funding from the GNU. In the past some Christian leaders expressed disappointment with the SIRC's ability to help Christians regain confiscated church property, and some Muslim leaders questioned SIRC's representation of all Muslims in the country.

The SCC includes 12 Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches in northern and southern Sudan. The SCC generally cooperated with the SIRC, although some SCC members expressed concerns that the SIRC is too close to the Government.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government encouraged respect for religious freedom in its discussions with the GNU and urged it to fulfill the promise of religious freedom made in the CPA and the INC. The U.S. Government made clear that continuing restrictions on religious freedom are an impediment to improved relations between the two countries.

U.S. Embassy officials met on a regular basis with leaders from many Muslim and Christian groups in Khartoum, Juba, and on trips outside the capital, noting the importance of religious tolerance and the extent of U.S. interest and concern. The Embassy sponsored a prominent Sufi Muslim cleric for the International Visitor Program. The Embassy also maintained contact with key figures in religious communities through occasional individual meetings and mailings of articles and reports relating to religious freedom.

Since 1999 the Secretary of State has designated Sudan a Country of Particular Concern annually under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Economic measures in effect against Sudan under the International Religious Freedom Act relate to the use of the voice and vote of the United States regarding loans or other International Financial Institutions' funds for Sudan pursuant to the International Financial Institutions Act.

SWAZILAND

The new Constitution, which went into effect on February 8, 2006, provides for freedom of religion. The Government generally respected freedom of religion in practice.

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

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 6,700 square miles and a population of 1.1 million. Christianity is the dominant religion. Zionism, a blend of Christianity

and indigenous ancestral worship, is the predominant religion in rural areas. A large Roman Catholic presence, including churches, schools, and other infrastructure, continues to flourish. The population is approximately 35 percent Protestant, 30 percent Zionist, 25 percent Catholic, and 1 percent Muslim. The remaining 9 percent of the population is divided among the Baha'i Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Judaism, and other religious groups. Followers of Islam and the Baha'i Faith generally are located in urban areas. There are few atheists.

Missionaries continue to play a role in rural development. Most immigrants from South Asia practice Islam.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Article 23 of the new Constitution states that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion." The Constitution protects the right to practice by guaranteeing "[the] freedom [to] worship either alone or in community with others."

Apart from the Constitution, there is no law, statute, or regulation that protects the right of religious freedom or provides effective remedies for the violation of that right.

Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, and Ascension Day are national holidays. The monarchy (and by extension the Government) supports many Christian activities. It has become common practice for the King, the Queen Mother, and other members of the royal family to attend various evangelical programs, including Good Friday and Easter weekend services. At such services the King is usually afforded the opportunity to preach. The royal family also occasionally attends Ascension worship services at the national stadium in the Ezulwini Valley, hosted by participating churches of the local evangelical movement.

There is no legislation in the country describing the organizational requirements of a religious group; however, new religious groups or churches are expected to register with the Government upon organizing. To be considered organized, a religious group must demonstrate possession of either substantial cash reserves or financial support from foreign religious groups with established ties to western or eastern religions. For indigenous religious groups, authorities consider demonstration of a proper building, a pastor or religious leader, and a congregation as sufficient to grant organized status. These organized religious groups are exempt from paying taxes, although they are not considered tax-deductible charities.

Portions of the capital city are zoned specifically for places of worship of all denominations. Government permission is required for the construction of new religious buildings in urban areas, and permission is required from chiefs in rural areas. Those religious groups that wish to construct new buildings may purchase a plot of land and apply for the required building permits. The Government has not restricted any religion with financial means from building a place of worship; however, non-Christian groups sometimes experience minor delays in obtaining permits from the Government to build residences for clergy due to a slow bureaucracy.

The Government allows religious instruction, primarily Christian, in public schools. Voluntary school clubs conducted daily prayer services in many public schools.

The Government neither restricts nor formally promotes interfaith dialogue, and it does not provide formal mechanisms for religions to reconcile differences.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Followers of all religious faiths generally were free to worship without Government interference or restriction. Teaching of Religious Knowledge as an elective subject in secondary and high schools is limited to Christian theology. The only organized religious youth clubs permitted to operate in schools are Christian, but the Government did not enforce this rule. During the reporting period, no complaints were registered by non-Christian groups regarding this practice.

The Government-owned television and radio stations did not permit non-Christian religious groups to broadcast messages. Christian programming was 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), carried at least one religious channel. Church groups owned several newsletters and magazines.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Five different religious groups peacefully maintain adjoining properties in Mbabane. There was no public conflict among religious groups during the period covered by this report.

Christian churches were well organized and were divided into three groups: the Council of Churches, the League of Churches, and the Conference of Churches. Each group was open to members of all denominations. However, Zionists and all African traditional churches belonged to the League of Churches; most evangelical churches associated with the Conference of Churches; and Anglican, Catholic, United Christian, Mennonite, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches generally belonged to the Council of Churches. These groups primarily produced common statements on political matters, facilitated the sharing of radio production facilities, or became involved with common rural development and missionary strategies. Although the groups sometimes strongly disagreed with one another, they have found common ground on topics of concern.

SECTION IV. U.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 and good relations with the various religious organizations.

TANZANIA

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

Despite the increased representation of Muslims in Government, tensions between Muslims and Christians persisted. There were a few cases of increased tension between secular and fundamentalist Muslims as the latter frequently called for Muslims to adopt a stricter interpretation of Islam in their daily lives.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 364,900 square miles and a population of 37 million, of which 36 million live on the mainland and 1 million on the Zanzibar archipelago. Current statistics on religious demography are unavailable because religious surveys were eliminated from Government census reports after 1967. Religious leaders and sociologists estimate that the Christian and Muslim communities are equal, each accounting for 30 to 40 percent of the population, with the remainder consisting of practitioners of other faiths and indigenous religions, and atheists.

Ninety-nine percent of the population on the Zanzibar archipelago is Muslim. On the mainland, Muslim communities are concentrated in coastal areas, with some large Muslim minorities also in inland urban areas. Between 80 and 90 percent of the country's Muslim population is Sunni; the remainder consists of several Shi'a subgroups, 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.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution does not establish any official religion and recognizes 8 days as religious holidays, four Christian and four Muslim. Following the unwritten rule that the presidency would alternate between a Christian and a Muslim, on May 4, 2005, the ruling party nominated Foreign Minister Jakaya Kikwete, a Muslim, to succeed President Mkapa, who is Catholic. Although perceived religious favoritism was not a campaign issue, there was increasing public discussion of balancing Government benefits among the country's religious communities.

Historically, some urban Muslim groups have perceived discrimination in Government hiring and law enforcement. This prompted the new Union administration, led by President Kikwete, to appoint Muslims to key Government positions, including the vice presidency, ambassadorships, and ministerial positions in the Ministries of Defense, Finance and Energy and Minerals after the elections in 2005. However, the perception among Christians is that the two former Presidents, both Christian, and former president Ali Hassan Mwinyi, a Muslim, maintained a balance between Christians and Muslims in sensitive and high-level posts, whereas President Kikwete appointed a disproportionate number of Muslims to high-level positions.

Customary and statutory laws govern Christians in both criminal and civil cases. Muslims are governed by customary and statutory law in criminal cases; however, in civil cases involving family matters such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, Islamic law is applied if both parties are Muslim and if they agree to be adjudicated under this law. Some Christian judges on the mainland continue to administer Islamic law for civil cases involving family law where all parties involved were Muslims. Some Muslim groups consider this inappropriate and reported it as a grievance against the legal system.

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. There was occasional debate during the reporting period about the establishment of Shari'a (Islamic law) in Zanzibar, but the number of advocates remained small.

The Government requires religious organizations to register with the Registrar of Societies at the Ministry of Home Affairs on the mainland and with the Chief Government Registrar on Zanzibar. To register, religious organizations must have at least 10 followers and provide a Constitution, the resumes of their leaders, and a letter of recommendation from their district commissioner. In addition, groups registering on Zanzibar must provide a letter of approval from the Mufti.

On the mainland, mosques belonging to the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA) elect a Mufti who, unlike in Zanzibar, is not a public servant. Some Muslim groups on the mainland claimed that they were also required to submit a letter of recommendation from BAKWATA to register; however, such groups did not report any difficulties in obtaining one. There were no reports that the Government refused the registration of any group on the mainland.

A semi-autonomous archipelago, Zanzibar elects its own President to serve as head of Government for matters internal to Zanzibar, and a parliament that can approve legislation pertaining to local affairs. The 2001 Mufti Law authorizes the President of Zanzibar to appoint an Islamic leader, or Mufti, to serve as a public employee of the Zanzibari Government. The Mufti possesses the authority to settle all religious disputes involving Muslims, approve all Islamic activities and gatherings on Zanzibar, supervise all Zanzibari mosques, and approve religious lectures by foreign clergy and the importation of Islamic literature from outside of Zanzibar. Under the 2001 Mufti Law, Zanzibar's Mufti is able to recommend that the Chief Government Registrar approve or deny the registration of any Islamic organization.

Previously, the Zanzibar Attorney General's Office reported that it was seeking input from various Muslim nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including some that have objected to the Mufti Law, before a state sanctioned review committee was to commence, as promised by the Zanzibari Ministry of Good Governance in 2004. In May 2007 officials from the Mufti's Office said that no committee had been formed to consider possible revisions to the Mufti Law. According to Zanzibari authorities, the modalities of the committee's formation were still in the process of being developed during the period covered by this report.

In November 2006 Zanzibar's Mufti recommended approval of at least one group (which sends Muslims to Mecca for the Hajj) and recommended denial of two groups associated with the Baha'i faith and the Ahmadiyya, citing contradictions between

the beliefs of these groups and Islam. The Ahmadiyya filed suit against the Mufti's Office in a regional magistrate's court to protest this recommendation. The court dismissed the case early in 2007.

Religious organizations occasionally appealed to the secular civil authorities for assistance in resolving quasi-religious disputes over ownership of places of worship, leadership of religious organizations, or burial practices within their denominations.

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 common, although they are generally taught on an ad hoc basis by parents or other volunteers. Classes must be approved by the school's administration and/or parent and teacher associations. Many schools and universities are associated with the Catholic Church and, the country maintains an Islamic university in Morogoro and numerous Islamic schools in Zanzibar. Unlike in public schools, some private schools make religious classes compulsory for all their students.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Missionaries were permitted to enter the country freely. This was particularly true on Zanzibar if proselytizing was ancillary to other religious activities. Citizens were permitted to leave the country for pilgrimages and other religious practices.

All religious organizations are banned from involvement in politics, and politicians are restricted 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 representatives who campaign in houses of worship or educational facilities.

In February 2007 to avoid increasing tensions, the Mufti's Office stopped a local youth group of Wahhabi/Salafi-inspired Muslims from building a mosque near another mosque that the group had unsuccessfully tried to take over in 2005.

In February 2007 Zanzibar's traffic police issued a ban on women from driving wearing veils, stating that veils could cause road accidents. Muslims on Zanzibar reportedly protested the ban as an attack on Islam. Although the ban is still in place, there have reportedly been no efforts to enforce it.

The law prohibits preaching or distributing material that is considered inflammatory and represents a threat to public order. In 2006 officials occasionally denied permits to religious organizations to hold public gatherings if they believed that the gathering could become confrontational or inflame religious tensions; however, there were no reports of such denials in 2007.

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 in police reports in case individuals are asked to give sworn testimony, according to their religion. The Government requires children to indicate their religion on school registration forms so that children can be assigned to the appropriate religion class if the school offers instruction.

Government policy forbids discrimination against persons on the basis of religious belief or practice; however, some officials and business persons were believed to favor conducting business with coreligionists.

During the reporting period, some Christian groups accused the current administration of religious bias against Christians citing the rapid appointment of Muslims to many important positions. For example, Christian pastors complained that it was sometimes difficult to get permits for outdoor rallies because most local government leaders in Dar es Salaam were Muslims. Former President Mwinyi was generally viewed by Christians as fair in his appointments. However, some Christians complained that he was responsible for opening the country up to a greater influx of aid from Arab countries—increasing the construction of mosques, and in short, trying to create a more "Islamic" country.

During the reporting period, several Muslim organizations continued to criticize both Zanzibar's Mufti Law and the mainland's practice of selecting a Mufti through BAKWATA, perceiving them as efforts by the Government to institutionalize Government oversight of Islamic organizations.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

To promote religious tolerance, in 2007 President Kikwete, First Lady Salma Kikwete and Muslim Government ministers and Members of Parliament participated regularly in Christian events such as inaugurations and fundraising activities of churches. Government officials frequently participated in interdenominational events sponsored by NGOs. When inaugurating the Karatu District Council building in the Arusha Region on March 23, 2007, the President reiterated the Government's commitment to serving all citizens equally irrespective of their religious and political affiliation. The President of Zanzibar, Amani Abeid Karume, supported interfaith initiatives and religious freedom.

In January 2007 the Uamsho met again with officials from the Mufti's Office to discuss provisions in the Mufti law regarding rally permits. The Mufti's Office confirmed that the law allowed religious groups to inform, rather than request permission from, its office to hold outdoor religious gatherings. As a result Uamsho began to hold weekly, instead of monthly, outdoor religious rallies. Between January and May 2007, Uamsho held 12 religious rallies.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Muslim-Christian relations remained stable in rural areas; however, some tension persisted in urban centers due to perceptions by some Muslim and Christian groups that the Government favored the other community in its hiring or law enforcement practices.

The July 2, 2007 edition of the *Citizen* reported that a priest of the Anglican Diocese of Central Tanganyika was arrested for his involvement in disrupting the church services of a Bishop who was sympathetic to homosexuality. A 60-year-old woman was seriously injured in the disturbance. An article dated April 11, 2007 stated that some members refused to allow the Bishop to perform Easter Mass and baptisms and threatened him with beatings after he made statements condoning homosexuality. The Dodoma Regional Police were investigating the threats at the end of the reporting period.

In 2007 tensions stemming from historical disparities in economic and educational opportunities available to Muslims and Christians were exacerbated by some public rallies at which religious debate resulted in physical altercations. A June 29, 2007, article reported that policemen in Morogoro region were forced to break up a similar religious debate where a Christian pastor was defending his faith before a group of Muslim clerics.

On May 3, a local press article reported that religious arguments between Christians and Muslims in Korogwe almost resulted in fighting with machetes. A March 20, 2007, article reported the BAKWATA district leadership in Korogwe, Tanga region had warned the District Commissioner, a Christian, not to interfere with religious rallies, or her job would be jeopardized. The BAKWATA district leadership contended that they would not stop their religious rallies even if Christians felt insulted by their remarks. The Tanga Regional Commissioner, a Muslim, met with BAKWATA leaders and told them that they had to abide by a law that barred religious groups from inciting its members against other religious groups.

In April 2007 an interfaith committee established by the Mufti's Office met to plan a meeting for late 2007 between the Mufti's Office, the Zanzibar Muslim Ulamaa (or Scholar's) Council, and Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant bishops to discuss peace-building initiatives. Created in February 2007, the interfaith committee consists of 6 Muslim leaders and 3 Christian leaders to seek ways of fostering peace and stability in Zanzibar.

A March 8, 2007, a Swahili daily article stated that Answaru Sunna Wahhabi Muslims beat other Ansar Suna Shafii Muslims with sticks at a burial ceremony for Mr. Sadiki Shaaban Kalondo. Each group claimed that the deceased was its member. After the intervention of the Dodoma Regional Police Commander, the deceased was buried as an Ansar Suna Shafii Muslim.

An article dated January 17, 2007, in the *Daily News,* an English newspaper, reported that the Mwanza Regional Police arrested 20 witch doctors for inciting violence and mob killings against suspected witches. According to the article, the witch doctors caused the death of 128 persons. The Government continued to condemn the killing of alleged witches and to prosecute offenders. In 2007 there was a decrease in reported killings of elderly individuals suspected of being witches.

Despite generally improved relations between religious groups, there were sporadic reports of religious-based violence and unease. Tensions between different Muslim groups reemerged on May 12, 2006, when Muslim sheikhs were quoted in a newspaper as strongly criticizing the office of the Zanzibar Mufti for remaining silent when both Mufti officials and local Muslims were viewed as compromising the

Islamic faith by being more concerned with secular pursuits, such as monetary gain, than with the promotion 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. As part of this strategy the U.S. Government encouraged continued economic reform as a means to alleviate poverty, which has been identified as a contributing factor in the growth of religious intolerance.

TOGO

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 21,925 square miles and a population of 5,701,600. The most recent available statistics, published by the Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2004, stated that the population is approximately 33 percent traditional animist, 28 percent Roman Catholic, 14 percent Sunni Muslim, 10 percent Protestant, and 10 percent Christians of other various denominations. Groups comprising less than 5 percent of the population include persons not affiliated with any religious group. Many converts to the more widespread religious groups continue to perform rituals that originated in traditional indigenous religious groups. The number of atheists in the country is unknown but estimated to be small.

Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions. Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians live mostly in the southern region.

Foreign missionaries 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

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 were no other laws or statutes that specifically restrict religious freedoms. Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims occupy positions of authority in the local and national governments.

The Government voted in favor of the 2004 U.N. General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance, which reaffirms that freedom of religion is an inherent human right.

The Government recognizes 7 Christian and 2 Islamic holy days as national holidays, including New Year, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, All Saints' Day, Christmas, Tabaski, and Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan).

The Government recognizes three main religious groups as state religions: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. The Government requires other religious groups to register as associations. Official recognition as an association affords a group the same rights as the official religions. Officially recognized religious groups that conduct humanitarian and development projects receive tax benefits on imports but must request such benefits through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Organizations must submit applications for registration to the Office of the Political and Civil Organizations Affairs at the Ministry of Territorial Administration. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, the names and addresses of executive board members, the pastor's diploma, a con-

tract, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. The criteria for recognition are the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order.

In 2006 the Government rejected the applications of a few religious groups, based on activities deemed illegal or immoral. In the past, the Government rejected the application of one Muslim group that it said was involved in supplying arms to northern Ghana. In another instance, the Government rejected the application of a Christian organization whose founders were accused of sexual harassment and embezzlement. Members of groups that were not officially recognized could practice their religion but did not have legal standing.

Religious organizations must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those involving loud ceremonies in residential areas or that block off city streets. Officials routinely granted these requests during the period covered by this report.

The Civil Security Division handles complaints associated with a religious organization, particularly noise complaints related to religious celebrations at night. The Ministry of Security sends security forces to address the complaints.

The Government recognized more than 758 religious groups over the past 16 years, although it is unknown how many of them still exist. Most new groups are small Protestant and Muslim congregations. The Office of the Political and Civil Organizations Affairs issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations and allows them to practice their religion, pending investigations and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years.

The Muslim Union of Togo reported that since 1991, 65 Muslim groups had registered with the Ministry of Interior and the Muslim Union of Togo, including Islamic development nongovernmental organizations and Islamic radio and television enterprises.

Foreign missionary groups must meet 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Religious groups are generally left alone if they refrain from political activities and human rights issues, unless their opinions support the regime. In December 2005 the Government-controlled media regulatory body, the High Authority for Radio-Television and Communication (HAAC) banned all political programs on community and religious radio and television stations. In the past, HAAC shut down or suspended broadcasts at Radio Maria, a popular station operated by a Catholic priest that has been critical of Government actions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Members of different religious groups regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies. Intermarriage between persons of different religious groups was common.

The Christian Council addressed common issues among Protestant denominations. The council comprises the Assemblies of God, Protestant Methodist, the Baptist Convention, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran, and Evangelical Presbyterian denominations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborated through the Biblical Alliance.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy organized activities to inform the public about religious diversity, values, and culture in the United States. The Embassy also hosted a dinner for Muslim leaders and distrib-

uted thousands of publications on U.S. society that included key portions on religious freedom.

The Embassy included religious leaders, particularly Muslim leaders, in the International Visitors Program and continued an English language program that contained segments about religious tolerance in the United States.

UGANDA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom; however, some members of the more traditional religious groups accused certain evangelical groups of practicing "witchcraft."

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. It is also active in sponsoring efforts to promote dialogue and harmony among religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 93,070 square miles and a population of 28.1 million. Christians constitute approximately 85 percent of the population and Muslims 12 percent. A variety of other religious groups, including indigenous religions, Hinduism, Baha'i, and Judaism, are practiced freely and combined represent an estimated 2 percent of the population. Among Christian groups, the Roman Catholic Church has the largest number of followers with 42 percent; the Anglican Church claim 36 percent. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are active, and their membership is growing. Muslims are mainly Sunni, although there are Shi'a followers of the Aga Khan among the Asian community. Several branches of Hinduism also are represented among the Asian community. There are few atheists.

In many areas, particularly in rural settings, some religious groups tended to be syncretistic. Deeply held indigenous beliefs were blended into or observed alongside the rites of other religions, particularly in areas that were predominantly Christian.

Missionary groups of several traditions were active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors; however, in practice the local officials imposed minor restrictions on nighttime congregating to curb violence and noise, which indirectly impeded on the worship services of some religious groups.

All new nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious organizations, must register with the NGO Board, a division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that regulates and oversees NGO services.

On April 7, 2006, Parliament amended and passed the NGO Registration Amendment Bill. The amendments include updating fines imposed on violators and providing the NGO Board with discretion over the duration and conditions of the permit, as well as various regulatory laws effecting NGOs in the country. Although the law is in place, pending parliamentary approval of statuary regulations, it remains nonoperational.

The process of registration takes at least 6 weeks. In practice, most religious organizations are granted permits; however, the NGO Board defers registration of some church groups for various reasons. Following incidents involving several religious branches and mass killings, local leaders have to recommend community churches in Kanungu District in order for them to gain registration by the NGO Board in Kampala. On December 8, 2006, the NGO Board deferred Isa Messial Congregations' application in Kampala in order to investigate alleged cult tendencies. The church was not registered during the reporting period.

Community-based organizations that operate in only one subcounty are not required to register with the NGO Board. Instead, they must register with the local

district government. Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports that local governments closed down community churches for failure to register. 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.

According to the Uganda Revenue Authority, the Uganda Revenue Authority Act amendment was revised in June 2006, and religious organizations are no longer required to pay taxes on any properties that earn income. Permits are necessary for the construction of facilities, including those of a religious nature.

Private madrassahs and Christian schools are common in the country. In public schools religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum covers academic study of world religions rather than instruction in one particular faith. There are also many private schools sponsored by religious groups that offer religious instruction. These schools are open to students of other faiths, but they usually do not offer minority religious instruction.

Prisoners are given the opportunity to pray on days devoted to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually are released from their work duties during the month of Ramadan. Religious holy days celebrated as national holidays include Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, during the reporting period there were reports that local government institutions took actions to restrict operation of religious organizations for security reasons. These measures were not aimed at religious organization specifically, as bans were issued to curb criminal activity and for noise abatement reasons.

National Government policy did not include restrictions on religious freedom.

On February 5, 2007, the NGO Board wrote to the district leaders in Mukono to advise them not to register the "Hornsleth Village Project"(HVP) group. The district leaders complied. In October 2006 the Government suspended the HVP in Mukono District due to fears that citizens were being enticed to join a religious cult. The initial 108 members of the project were required to adopt the founder's name, Kristian von Hornsleth, in order to formalize their registration and receive benefits such as livestock. The members entered a legal name change process and received new identity cards.

On August 1, 2006, the Supreme Court in Kampala dismissed an appeal filed in March 2005 by members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church seeking a ban on weekend classes at Makerere University. The seven-member panel ruled that the university's policy of holding weekend classes was "rational, fair, and proportional."

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On September 21, 2005, a court acquitted Prophet Ssali Kilimba Mwaka on all charges of conducting an illegal society, practicing witchcraft, and being in possession of articles used in witchcraft. Mwaka had been apprehended by police in May 2005 in Mubende District; Mwaka was later released on bail. There is no specific law which prohibits the practice of witchcraft.

In 2005 police in Gulu arrested Severino Lukoya, the father of former rebel leader Alice Lakwena, and three other pastors for operating the unregistered New Melta Jerusalem Church. Authorities stated they were arrested because of their connection with Lakwena. On February 28, 2005, police released the four pastors with a warning. During the reporting period, the Government refused to register the New Malta Jerusalem Church for security reasons.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of tension within the Pentecostal church over questionable conduct by individual churches. For example, Pastor Simeon Kayiwa, Head of Namirembe Christian Fellowship Church based in Kampala, was accused by other churches of using witchcraft while performing pastoral work. On September 22, 2006, police and the Association of Born Again Churches Committee exonerated and cleared Kayiwa of the allegations.

As in the previous reporting period, several religious alliances, including the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, Reli-

gious Efforts for Teso and Karamoja, and the Uganda Joint Christian Council 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. Embassy officials met with leaders of various religious institutions, including representatives from the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, Uganda Muslim Education Association; the Church of Uganda, the Catholic Church, the National Fellowship of Born Again Churches of Uganda, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, and the Uganda Joint Christian Council. The promotion of religious freedoms was a specific goal of these meetings.

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 matters of bilateral interest. International visitor grants allowed influential Muslim leaders to travel to the United States, where they shared their experiences with fellow Muslims. The U.S. Embassy sponsored representatives of the Muslim American community to foster dialogue and understanding with Muslim Ugandans and share experiences as Muslims living in a pluralistic society. The U.S. Government worked with and through faith-based organizations to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict areas of northern Uganda.

ZAMBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. A 1996 amendment to the Constitution declared Christianity to be the official religion of the country while upholding the right of every person to enjoy that person's freedom of conscience or religion.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 290,586 square miles and a population of 11.5 million. According to a 2000 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, 1 percent is Muslim or Hindu, and 7 percent adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions. Five percent did not report their religion.

The majority of indigenous persons are either Roman Catholic or Protestant; however, many Christians hold some traditional beliefs as well. There has been an upsurge of new Pentecostal churches that have attracted many young adherents.

Muslims are primarily concentrated in areas along the railroad line from Lusaka to Livingstone, in Chipata, and in other parts of Eastern Province. Many citizens of South Asian descent are Muslim, although Hindus constitute a sizable percentage of this group as well. A small minority of indigenous persons is also Muslim.

Foreign missionary groups are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Article 19 of the Constitution provides for 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. Other statutes provide effective remedies for the violation of religious freedom. These provisions are enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

The Oasis Forum—composed of the Law Association of Zambia, the Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) Coordinating Committee, the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia—continued to be active during the period covered by this report. In April 2007 the Oasis Forum declared a "constitutional struggle," adopting a roadmap that calls for the Government to empower a constituent assembly to adopt a new Constitution by the end of 2008. The Government criticized the Oasis Forum over its stance on the constitutional review process and the mode of adoption of a new Constitution. Church leaders continued to freely and vocally criticize the Government, organize activities, and mobilize public opinion.

Religious instruction is provided for Christians in public schools but not for Muslims.

The following holy days are considered national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

There are governmental controls that require the registration of religious groups. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups, although there were reports that the Government began to enforce registration requirements more strictly. The burdensome registration requirements forced at least one church group to suspend operations pending its ability to comply. To be eligible for registration groups must have a unique name; possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws; and display compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. Unregistered religious groups are not allowed to operate. Violators can face a fine and imprisonment for up to 7 years.

In March 2006 then-Foreign Minister Ronnie Shikapwasha stated publicly that the Government would begin the practice of consulting with the Council of Churches before it registers new church groups. The new policy was not tested in practice, because there were no attempts to register a new church with the Government since the announcement. The Universal Church of God continued to press for a court order finding Government officials in contempt following the February 2006 deportation of two of its ministers. The Church argued that the deportation of the ministers violated a High Court order that nullified a Government decision to deregister the Church in 2006 and stayed proceedings against the Church pending the outcome of the Government's appeal to the Supreme Court. The High Court did not rule on the Church's contempt petition during the reporting period. The Church continued to operate in the country.

There were no reports that foreign missionary groups faced any special requirements or restrictions beyond those imposed on other foreigners.

The Government requires religious instruction in public schools. Such instruction is conducted in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions and is mandatory for all students through grade seven. Islamic or other forms of religious education are not available in public schools; however, they are available in private schools owned and controlled by those religious groups. Parents can also homeschool their children.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Leaders of various ecumenical movements, such as the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and interfaith dialogue and to discuss national concerns.

SECTION IV. U.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 met with a wide spectrum of religious representatives to promote interreligious dialogue and collaboration on several areas of concern. The Em-

bassy funded a Muslim women's group that conducted workshops to emphasize the importance of religious tolerance and the need to respect human rights. The Embassy also donated books to the religion department and library at the University of Zambia, and the library of the Zambia Open University.

ZIMBABWE

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

While the Government has historically had good relations with religious groups, it continued to criticize, harass, and intimidate religious leaders who were critical of Government policies or who spoke out against human rights abuses committed by the Government. Unlike in previous years, there were no reported instances of violence against religious leaders who were critical of Government policies; however, church leaders and members who criticized the Government faced arrest, temporary detention, and, in the case of foreigners, possible deportation.

Divisions between mainstream Christian religious groups and practitioners of indigenous religions continued. An interfaith council formed in 2004 continued to work towards creating closer ties between different religious groups.

The U.S. 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 150,760 square miles and a population of 12.3 million. It is estimated that between 70 and 80 percent of the population belong to mainstream Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist Churches; however, over the years a variety of indigenous churches and groups have emerged from these mainstream denominations. Evangelical denominations, primarily Pentecostal churches and apostolic groups, were the fastest growing group during the reporting period.

While the country is overwhelmingly Christian, the majority of the population continues to believe, to varying degrees, in indigenous religions as well. Religious leaders also reported an increase in adherence to traditional religion and healers.

Islam accounts for 1 percent of the population and also continued to grow, particularly in rural areas where Muslim-led humanitarian efforts are often organized. The remainder of the population includes practitioners of Greek Orthodoxy, Judaism, and traditional indigenous religions. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, and atheists.

While political elites tend to be associated with one of the established Christian churches, there is no correlation between membership in any religious group and political or ethnic affiliation.

Foreign missionary groups are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion, and the Government showed no favoritism to any group based on religious affiliation, although the majority of political elites adhered to mainstream Christian denominations.

Christmas and Easter are national holidays. There were no reports of non-Christians experiencing discrimination when celebrating other religious holidays.

In July 2006 an amendment to the previously criticized Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA) took effect that criminalizes any practice "commonly associated with witchcraft" only if that practice is intended to cause harm. Under this new framework, spoken words alone are no longer considered a witchcraft practice or evidence of illegal activity. The amendment also criminalizes witch hunts, imposes criminal penalties for falsely accusing others of witchcraft, and rejects killing of a witch as a defense for murder. At the end of the reporting period, there were no new or out-

standing cases under the witchcraft law. Attacks on individuals in witchcraft related cases appear to be prosecuted under laws for assault, murder, or other crimes.

Proponents of the WSA amendment applauded it for recognizing certain elements of witchcraft as part of traditional culture and regarded it as a positive step in recognizing indigenous religions. Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA), for example, welcomed the amendment for differentiating negative witchcraft from traditional beliefs and enabling traditional healers to operate more openly, without fear of either witch hunters or prosecution.

The Government does not require religious groups to be registered; however, religious organizations that operate schools or medical facilities are required to register those specific institutions with the appropriate ministry regulating their activities. Religious institutions are allowed to apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Customs Department. These requests were generally granted.

Curriculums at public primary and secondary schools are set by the Ministry of Education. Private schools, many of which are church-run, also follow the Government-set curricula but are allowed to include religious instruction as well. In public institutions of higher education, they are set by curriculum boards that usually include Ministry of Education officials. Many public secondary schools include a religious education course that focuses on Christian religious groups but covers other religions and emphasizes the need for religious tolerance. Most public universities offer degrees in religious education that primarily focus on Christian doctrine.

The country has a long history of Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist primary and secondary schools. The Government permits, and does not regulate, religious education in these private schools. Since independence there has been a proliferation of evangelical basic education schools. Christian schools, the majority of which are Catholic, constitute one-third of the schools in the country. Islamic, Hindu, and Hebrew primary and secondary schools are also found in the major urban areas such as Harare and Bulawayo. Additionally, several private institutions of higher education include religious studies as a core component of the curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Religious groups continued to be challenged by the Government's restrictive laws regarding freedoms of assembly, expression, and association. Although not specifically aimed at religious activities, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) continued to be used to interfere with religious and civil society groups organizing public prayer rallies. Although POSA exempts "religious" activities/events, the Government generally views any public gatherings that are critical of the regime as political even if the nature of the event is religious.

Although there are no official statistics on the prevalence of foreign missionaries in the country, missionaries are known to operate in the country. Most often, these missionaries run schools, hospitals, and humanitarian aid organizations. The Government views with suspicion those missionaries it considers politically motivated. Missions generally operated without Government interference, although they occasionally experienced delays implementing some humanitarian relief activities and in having their work permits issued.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Unlike in the previous years, there were no reports that the Government forced congregants to dismantle their places of worship. During the reporting period, there were no updates to any previously reported cases involving the destruction of places of worship and charities run by religious organizations as part of the Government-ordered Operation Restore Order campaign in 2005. Operation Restore Order mandated the destruction of "illegal structures."

There were no further developments in the cases involving members of WOZA who were detained during a prayer vigil in April 2005 while awaiting election results. Additionally, no investigation into the burning of a church building by supporters of a ruling party parliamentary candidate in March 2005 was begun.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Divisions between mainstream Christian religious groups and practitioners of traditional religions continued. Unlike in previous years, there were no reported cases of discrimination against Muslims in private work places, although the religious

community believed isolated incidents of this type continued to occur. The Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Baha'i, and Buddhist religious communities were relatively small and generally were not in open competition with Christian denominations for converts.

At least five umbrella religious organizations continued to operate during the reporting period. These groups included: the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC); the Heads of Denominations, an association of Christian denominations created to facilitate collaboration among Christian groups and the Government in the operation of religious schools and hospitals; Fambidzano, a group of indigenous churches; ZINATHA, an organization that represents traditional healers; and the Islamic Council, an umbrella organization for Muslim groups in the country.

There were continuing reports of tensions between traditional indigenous religions and mainstream Christian churches. Some indigenous churches' acceptance of polygamy and avoidance of modern medicine were common sources of tension. One leader of a traditional religious group reported that he believed that traditional religious leaders were not always consulted or taken seriously by the mainstream religious groups, especially in terms of addressing the country's problems. However, religious leaders from a wide spectrum of churches and groups continued to discuss these matters productively in meetings of the interfaith council and suggested possible areas of cooperation, such as HIV/AIDS.

Reports of possible ritual killings and mutilations continued to be cited by newspapers and women and children's rights groups throughout the reporting period. Police usually inquired into these killings; however, limited resources prevented police from conducting many investigations or identifying perpetrators.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Practitioners of indigenous religions, including traditional healers, experienced improved relations with the Government. The Government was more inclusive of indigenous religions, of which it has traditionally been suspicious, and tolerant of witchcraft practices, which it had previously attempted to restrict. Unlike in previous years, President Mugabe made no negative statements about evangelical or indigenous churches, and he also met with leaders from these groups.

In July 2006 an amendment to the previously criticized WSA took effect that identifies witchcraft practices as those "commonly associated with witchcraft" and criminalizes those practices only if intended to cause harm. Under this new framework, spoken words alone are no longer considered a witchcraft practice or evidence of illegal activity. The amendment also criminalizes witch hunts, imposes criminal penalties for falsely accusing others of witchcraft, and rejects killing of a witch as a defense for murder. At the end of the reporting period, there were no new or outstanding cases under the witchcraft law.

Proponents of the WSA amendment applauded it for recognizing certain elements of witchcraft as a part of traditional culture and regarded it as a positive step in recognizing indigenous religions. ZINATHA, for example, welcomed the amendment for differentiating negative witchcraft from traditional beliefs and enabling traditional healers to operate more openly, without fear of either witch hunters or prosecution.

SECTION IV. U.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 widely disseminated relevant reports on religious rights and hosted an event that promoted religious pluralism. U.S. Government officials privately and publicly emphasized concern regarding intimidation and harassment of religious officials who criticized the Government.

EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

AUSTRALIA

The law 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were few reports of societal abuses based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 2.9 million square miles and a population of 21 million. According to the 2006 census, 64 percent of citizens consider themselves to be Christian, including 26 percent Roman Catholic, 19 percent Anglican, and 19 percent other Christian. Buddhists constitute 2.1 percent of the population, Muslims 1.7 percent, Hindus 0.7 percent, Jews 0.4 percent, and all others professing a religion 0.5 percent.

At the time of European settlement, aboriginal inhabitants followed religions that were animistic, involving belief in spirits behind the forces of nature and the influence of ancestral spirit beings. According to the 2006 census, 5,206 persons, or less than 0.03 percent of respondents, reported practicing aboriginal traditional religions, down from 5,244 in 2001. The 2006 census reported that almost 64 percent of Aborigines practice some form of Christianity, and 20 percent listed no religion.

During the first census, in 1911, 96 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian. In recent decades traditional Christian denominations have seen their total number and proportion of affiliates stagnate or decrease significantly, although from 2001 to 2006, the total number of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians increased by 12.9 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 increased the ethnic diversity of existing Christian denominations. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of Buddhists increased 17 percent to 418,000 persons, Muslims 21 percent to 340,393, Jews 6 percent to 89,000, and Hindus increased 55 percent to 148,131. In 2006 approximately 18.7 percent of citizens considered themselves to have no religion, up from 17 percent in 2001, and 11.2 percent made no statement regarding religious affiliation. According to a 2002 survey, 23 percent of adults had participated in church or religious activities during the previous 3 months. Missionaries operate freely in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution bars the Federal Government from making a law that imposes a state religion or religious observance, prohibits the free exercise of religion, or sets a religious test for a Federal public office. However, these Federal constitutional prohibitions do not restrict the legislative powers of the states.

Public holidays include the Christian holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day. Although the Government is secular, each session of Parliament begins with a joint recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Religious adherents who have suffered religious discrimination may have recourse under Federal discrimination laws or through the court system. Under the provisions of the Federal Racial Discrimination Act, the independent federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) mediates a complaint when a plaintiff's religious affiliation is considered tantamount to membership in an ethnic group.

Commonwealth and state public service agencies are very active in promoting religious tolerance in the workplace. Australian Public Service employees that believe they have been denied a promotion on religious grounds can appeal to the office of the Australian Public Service Merit Protection Commissioner.

Another Federal law, the Workplace Relations Act, prohibits termination of employment on the basis of religion. In May 2007, the media reported that an employer withdrew a job offer to a Christian pastor after he had refused to sign an Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA) which required him to be available to work on Sundays. Responding to union claims that a "right to worship" clause was needed, the Federal Workplace Relations Minister said that AWAs are subject to the same anti-discrimination laws as any other agreement and workers had the right to refuse shifts.

The State of Tasmania is the only state or territory whose Constitution specifically provides citizens with the right to profess and practice their religion. However, seven of the eight states and territories have laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of a person's religion or ethno-religious background. South Australia is the only jurisdiction that does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion. All jurisdictions, apart from South Australia, have established independent agencies to mediate allegations of religious discrimination.

Minority religious groups and communities were generally given equal rights to land, status, and the building of places of worship. However, in the past a number of small city councils refused their local Muslim and Buddhist communities planning permits to construct places of worship. Those religious communities successfully appealed the councils' decisions to the courts.

On May 31, 2007 the Islamic Council of Victoria and Catch the Fire Ministries agreed to mediation in a case involving alleged vilification of Muslims. In 2003 the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) had filed a complaint under Victoria's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act against the pastors and their ministry organization. The act makes illegal "conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of, that other person or class of persons" on the grounds of religious belief. In June 2005 the Victoria Civil and Administrative Tribunal ordered two Christian pastors affiliated with Catch the Fire Ministries to make a public apology, via newspaper advertisements, for critical comments that they had made regarding Islam. It was estimated that the newspaper advertisements would cost A$68,690 (US$52,900). The Tribunal also ordered the pastors not to repeat the comments anywhere in the country. In August 2005 the Court of Appeal granted a stay on the order for an apology but left in place the order that the pastors not repeat the comments. The pastors appealed the court of appeal's decision to the Victoria Supreme Court. On December 14, 2006, the Supreme Court agreed with the court of appeal, finding that the Tribunal had misinterpreted the Act. The Court ordered the case back to the Tribunal to be heard by a different judge.

Religious groups are not required to register. However, to receive tax-exempt status, nonprofit religious groups must apply to the Australian Tax Office (ATO). Registration with the ATO has no affect on how religious groups are monitored, apart from standard ATO checks seeking to confirm that tax-exempt groups continue to meet certain guidelines.

The Government permits religious education in public schools, generally taught by volunteers using approved curriculum, with the option for parents to have their child not attend. On October 26, 2006, Prime Minister John Howard announced the National School Chaplaincy Program to provide annual support of up to A$20,000 (US$16,700) for Government and nongovernment school communities seeking to establish or extend school chaplaincy services. By May 30, 2007, the Government had received 1,503 applications, representing 15 percent of all schools.

The Government has put in place extensive programs to promote public acceptance of diversity and cultural pluralism, and has funded a variety of interfaith forums, including the International Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation. For example, as part of the Government's "National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security," it announced in January 2007 that it had committed A$8 million (US$6.7 million) to fund a National Centre of Excellence in Islamic Studies that would be based at the University of Melbourne, Griffith University, and the University of Western Sydney.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports of societal abuses based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Several nongovernmental organizations promoted tolerance and better understanding among religious groups in the country. These groups included the Columbian Center for Christian-Muslim Relations, the National Council of Churches in Australia and its affiliated Aboriginal and Islander Commission, and the Australian Council of Christians and Jews.

In October 2006 a senior Muslim cleric in Sydney made statements in a sermon implying that immodestly dressed women, whom he compared to "uncovered meat," invited rape. Many other Muslim clerics, as well as Government and opposition politicians, women's groups, and media commentators, condemned the remarks. The cleric stated his remarks were taken out of context, but he issued a formal apology and stated he did not condone rape.

Two Muslim schools in Perth received threatening telephone calls following the controversial remarks by the cleric in Sydney. Police arrested a suspect and charged him with making the calls. In February 2007 the suspect was found guilty of harassment and fined A$2,000 (US$1,700) plus court costs.

Some Muslim leaders claimed that anti-Muslim sentiment in the country was increasing in the wake of public debate about the integration of Muslim immigrants into Australian society.

In the 12-month period ending September 30, 2006, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry recorded 440 anti-Semitic incidents, a 32.5 percent increase over the previous period. Although the overall total was lower than the record set in 2002, it was 47 percent higher than the average annual total. In November 2006 a delegation from the Executive Council of Australian Jewry briefed 38 university vice chancellors on the ongoing problem of anti-Semitism on university campuses.

In December 2006 the leader of the neo-Nazi Australian Nationalist Movement was released under an agreement in which he pled guilty to criminal damage and conspiracy to cause arson and agreed to leave the state of Western Australia. He had previously denied connection to incidents in 2004 in which several Asian-owned businesses and a synagogue in Perth were firebombed or sprayed with racist graffiti.

In October 2006 two independent investigations reported that inadequate police resources, training, and communication contributed to religiously charged riot in the Sydney suburb of Cronulla in December 2005. Angered by suspicions that a group of Lebanese-Australian youths had assaulted two lifeguards, rioters displayed anti-Arab and anti-Muslim slogans and attacked bystanders perceived to be of Middle Eastern origin or Muslim. Thirty-one persons were injured in the fighting. The following day, retaliatory vandalism and other assaults were reported around Sydney. Prominent Christian and Muslim leaders condemned the violence.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

BRUNEI

The Constitution states, "The religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Muslim religion according to the Shafi'i 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 imposed many restrictions on non-Shafi'i and non-Islamic religious practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. Practitioners of non-Muslim faiths are not allowed to proselytize. All private schools offer voluntary Islamic instruction to Muslim students, and all post-secondary students are required to attend courses on the national Malay Muslim Monarchy ideology. Schools are not allowed to teach Christianity. The Government uses a range of municipal and planning laws and other legislation to restrict the expansion of religions other than official Islam.

The Government sponsored a multi-faith delegation to the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in Cyprus in July 2006.

The country's various religious groups coexisted peacefully. The law discourages Muslims from learning about other faiths. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize a range of activities to explain and propagate Islam, as well as offering financial incentives and housing. The Government also funds construction of mosques.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy supported religious freedom through a number of programs, including the Fulbright exchange program, visits to places of worship, and dialogue with Government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 2,200 square miles and a population of 380,000. According to Government statistics of citizens, there are 171, 892 Muslims, 8,901 Buddhists, 3,530 Christians, 372 Catholics, 32 Baha'i, 131 Hindus, 23 Atheists, 22 Taoists, 18 Sikhs, 17 Jews, and 3 Nasrani; as well as 32 individuals of other faiths and 7,884 who did not state their faith. Among permanent residents, according to the same statistics, there are 13,911 Muslims, 9,088 Buddhists, 3,088 Christians, 322 Catholics, 40 Baha'i, 99 Hindus, 11 Atheists, 18 Taoists, 15 Sikhs, 13 Jews, and 2 Nasrani, as well as 31 of other faiths and 6,910 who did not state their faith. These statistics did not cover a large expatriate population of temporary residents that included Muslims, Christians, and Hindus.

There are 109 mosques and prayer halls, 7 Christian churches, 3 Chinese temples, and 2 Hindu temples officially registered in the country.

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

The Societies Order of 2005 compels all organizations, including any religious group that is a non-Sunni Shafi'i sect of Islam, to register. The order also requires organizations to name all members. An organization that fails to register can face charges of unlawful assembly and be fined. Individuals who participate in or influence others to join unregistered organizations can be fined, arrested, and imprisoned. Approval to register is at the discretion of the Registrar of Societies (who is also the Commissioner of Police) and may be refused for any reason. There were no reports of religiously motivated refusal to register organizations during the reporting period. The Government continued to use zoning laws that prohibit the use of private homes as places of worship. While the country has three officially registered Chinese temples, other unregistered temples, many of which are in private homes, are known to operate but have not faced charges for failing to register.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Since the early 1990s, the Government has reinforced the legitimacy of the hereditary monarchy and the observance of traditional and Muslim values by asserting a national ideology known as the Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), or Malay Islamic Monarchy, the genesis of which reportedly dates from the 15th century. MIB principles have been adopted as the basis for government, and all meetings and ceremonies commence with a Muslim prayer. At citizenship ceremonies non-Muslims must wear national dress, which includes Muslim head coverings for men and women. There is no legal requirement for women to wear head coverings in public, and Govern-

ment officials are portrayed regularly, if infrequently, in the media without head coverings. There is social pressure for women to wear head coverings in public.

Despite constitutional provisions providing for the full and unconstrained exercise of religious freedom, the Government restricted the practice of non-Muslim religions by prohibiting proselytizing of all faiths other than the Shafi'i sect of Islam. The Government has banned the importation of religious teaching materials or scriptures such as the Bible and refused permission to establish or build churches, temples, or shrines. The Government allows only the practice of the official Shafi'i school of Islam. It has banned several other religious groups that it considers deviant, including the Islamic Al-Arqam movement and the Baha'i Faith. In February 2007 the Government banned as deviant teachings three sects: Saihoni Tasipan, Al-Ma'unah, and Abdul Razak Muhammad. The Government readily investigated and took proscriptive action against purveyors of radical Islam or "deviationist" Islamic groups. The Government periodically warned the population about "outsiders" preaching radical Islamic fundamentalist or unorthodox beliefs and warned Muslims against Christian evangelists, most recently in 2005 during a sermon at the national mosque.

A 1964 fatwa issued by the State Mufti strongly discourages Muslims from assisting non-Muslim organizations in perpetuating their faiths, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs reportedly uses the fatwa to influence other Government authorities either to deny non-Muslim religious organizations permission for a range of religious and administration activities or to fail to respond to applications from these groups. Nonetheless, Christian churches and their associated schools have been allowed for safety reasons to repair, expand, and renovate buildings on their sites and to carry out minor building works. In 2006 the Government approved a request from Anglican St. Andrews Church to undertake a major refurbishment of its buildings, a significant development. Following a suspension of the permit, the reconstruction permit was reissued in March 2007, and reconstruction was largely completed during the reporting period.

The Government does not impose any restrictions on Chinese temples to celebrate seasonal religious events provided that the temples obtain permission from relevant authorities. Since 2005 the Government has begun permitting Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations outside the grounds of the Chinese temple, and public lion dances that are an integral part of celebrating this event at businesses and homes were common during the reporting period. Any public assembly of five or more persons requires official approval in advance, regardless of the purpose of the assembly, religious or other.

Unregistered temples—as with any unregistered organization—were not allowed to organize functions and celebrations

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

There were reports in the past that agents of the Internal Security Department monitored religious services at Christian churches and that senior church members believed that they were under intermittent surveillance.

The Government asks visitors to identify their religion on their landing cards, although many persons do not comply and have not been challenged.

Authorities continued to arrest persons for offenses under Shari'a, such as *khalwat* (close proximity between the sexes) and consumption of alcohol. According to statistics released by religious authorities, 31 *khalwat* cases were reported during the period covered by this report. The arresting forces in these crackdowns were comprised of civilian and religious police. Most of those arrested or detained for a first offense were fined and released, although in the past, some persons were imprisoned for up to 4 months for repeated offenses of *khalwat*. By law, men are liable to a $634 (B$1000) and women to a $317 (B$500) fine if convicted of *khalwat*.

Religious authorities regularly participated in raids to confiscate alcoholic beverages and non-halal meats. They also monitored restaurants and supermarkets to ensure conformity with halal practice. Restaurants and service employees that served a Muslim in daylight hours during the fasting month were subjected to fines. Non-halal restaurants and non-halal sections in supermarkets were allowed to operate without interference from religious authorities.

The Ministry of Education requires courses on Islam and the MIB in all public schools. Private schools are not required to teach Islam, but many make voluntary *Ugama* instruction available on an extra-curricular, after-hours basis. *Ugama* is a 6-year education system that teaches Islam under the Sunni Shafi'i school of thought. Most school textbooks were illustrated to depict Islam as the norm, and often all women and girls were shown wearing the Muslim head covering. There

were no depictions of practices of other religions in textbooks. The Ministry prohibits the teaching of other religions and comparative religious studies. At one private school that offers Islam instruction during regular school hours, Christian students have been allowed to attend church during those periods when Muslim students receive instruction about Islam.

The Government did not prohibit or restrict parents from giving religious instruction to children in their own homes.

Religious authorities encouraged Muslim women to wear the tudong, a traditional head covering, and many women did so. In Government schools and at higher institutes of learning, Muslim and non-Muslim female students must wear Muslim attire, including a head covering as a part of their uniform. Male students are expected to wear the songkok (hat). In the past there were reports that non-Muslim women teachers at public schools were sometimes pressured by Government officials or colleagues to wear Muslim attire.

In accordance with the Government's interpretation of Qur'anic precepts, Muslim women have similar rights as Muslim men in important areas such as in divorce and custody of children as stated under the Emergency (Islamic Family Law) Order 1999. A Muslim woman can file for divorce on the grounds of long absence of her husband without valid reason, his long imprisonment, refusal to provide for his wife, or impotence. In case of divorce, the young children remain in custody of their mother; however, the father must provide financial support for the children's welfare. The Government's interpretation of Islamic practice for inheritance holds that female Muslims' inheritance will be half the size of the male's inheritance. A 2002 amendment to the Brunei Nationality Act allows citizenship to be transmitted through the mother as well as through the father.

Marriage between Muslims and those of other faiths is not permitted, and non-Muslims must convert to Islam if they wish to marry a Muslim. Muslims who wish to convert to another religion face such official and societal pressure not to leave Islam that conversion is extremely difficult if not impossible in practice. Permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs must be obtained to convert from Islam, and there were no reports of anyone requesting such permission during the reporting period. 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. Government statistics reported that 8 percent of the 312 conversions to Islam during the reporting period were due to marriage. Unlike in the past, there were no cases of divorced Muslim converts who, because of official and societal pressure, remained officially Muslim if they did not wish to do so.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Those adhering to faiths other than Islam are allowed to practice their beliefs, provided that they exercise restraint and do not proselytize. In the past non-Muslims who proselytized were arrested or detained and sometimes held without charges for extended periods of time; however, no such arrests or detentions occurred during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. If parents convert to Islam, conversion of the child requires his or her personal commitment and is not automatic. A person must be at least 14 years old to make such a commitment. In the past there were reports of teenage children who refused such conversion despite family and official pressure.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In February 2007 the Sultan and royal family members attended several Chinese New Year celebration events sponsored by the Chinese community.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The country's various religious groups coexist peacefully, but ecumenical interaction is hampered by the dominant Islamic religious ethos, which discourages Muslims from learning about other faiths. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize a range of *dakwah* or proselytizing activities and incentives to explain and propagate Islam. Among the incentives to converts, especially those from the indigenous communities in rural areas, are monthly financial assistance, new homes, electric generators, and water pumps.

The country's national philosophy, the MIB concept, discourages open-mindedness to religions other than Islam, and there are no programs to promote understanding of other religions. The country's indigenous people generally convert either to Islam or Christianity but rarely to Buddhism.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy has increased contacts and dialogue with Government officials and representatives of all religious organizations. In 2006 the Embassy, as part of its outreach program, distributed "Islam in America" publications to higher educational institutes during a public exhibition. Embassy officials met with members of minority faiths. Embassy representatives continued to press the Government to adhere to the spirit of its Constitution and its declarations on human rights. On January 17, 2007, the Embassy also hosted its first digital video conference on Islamic Studies in the United States. The Embassy also supported the visit to the United States of the Deputy Minister of Education in April 2007 to promote student and teacher exchanges between United States and the country's Islamic studies programs.

BURMA

Highly repressive, authoritarian military regimes have ruled the country since 1962. Constitutional protection of religious freedom has not existed since 1988, after the armed forces brutally suppressed massive prodemocracy demonstrations and abrogated the Constitution. In 1990 pro-democracy parties won a majority of seats in a free and fair election, but the junta of senior military officers refused to recognize the results and has ruled the country by decree and without a legislature ever since. The authorities generally permitted most adherents of registered religious groups to worship as they choose; however, the Government imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abused the right to freedom of religion.

There was no change in the limited respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to infiltrate and covertly and overtly monitor meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. The Government systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom and discouraged and prohibited minority religious groups from constructing new places of worship. In some cases, Government officials destroyed existing places of worship. The Government also actively promoted Theravada Buddhism over other religions, particularly among members of ethnic minorities. Christian and Islamic groups continued to have trouble obtaining permission to repair existing places of worship or build new ones. Anti-Muslim violence continued, as did the close monitoring of Muslim activities. Restrictions on worship of other non-Buddhist minority groups also continued throughout the country. Although there were no new reports of forced conversions of non-Buddhists, the Government applied pressure on students and poor youth to convert to Buddhism. Adherence or conversion to Buddhism is generally a prerequisite for promotion to senior Government and military ranks.

During the period covered by this report, social tensions continued between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities. Widespread prejudice existed against citizens of South Asian origin, many of whom are Muslims.

The U.S. Government advocated religious freedom with all facets of society, including with Government officials, religious leaders, private citizens, scholars, diplomats of other governments, and international business and media representatives. Embassy representatives offered support to local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious leaders, and acted as a conduit for information exchanges with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders. Since 1999 the U.S. Secretary of State has designated the country as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The U.S. Government has a wide array of sanctions in place against the country for its violations of human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 261,970 square miles and a population of more than 54 million. The majority follow Theravada Buddhism, although in practice, popular Burmese Buddhism coexisted with astrology, numerology, fortune telling, and veneration of indigenous pre-Buddhist era deities called "nats." Buddhist monks, includ-

ing novices, number more than 400,000 and depend on the laity for their material needs, including clothing and daily donations of food. The country has a much smaller number of Buddhist nuns. The principal minority religious groups include Christian groups (Baptists, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and an array of other Protestant denominations), Muslims (mostly Sunni), Hindus, and practitioners of traditional Chinese and indigenous religions. According to official statistics, almost 90 percent of the population practice Buddhism, 6 percent practice Christianity, and 4 percent practice Islam. These statistics almost certainly underestimate the non-Buddhist proportion of the population, which could be as high as 30 percent. Independent scholarly researchers place the Muslim population at 6 to 10 percent. A tiny Jewish community in Rangoon has a synagogue but no resident rabbi to conduct services for the approximately 25 Jewish believers.

The country is ethnically diverse, with 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 the Chin and Naga ethnic groups of the western region, some of whom continue to practice traditional indigenous religions. Protestant groups report recent rapid growth among animist communities in Chin State. Christianity is also practiced widely among the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups of the southern and eastern regions, although many Karen and Karenni are Buddhist. In addition, some ethnic Indians are Christian. Hinduism is practiced chiefly by Burmese of Indian origin, who are concentrated in major cities and in the south central region. Islam is practiced widely in Rakhine State, where it is the dominant religion of the Rohingya minority, and in Rangoon, Ayeyarwady, Magway, and Mandalay Divisions. Some Burmans, Indians, and ethnic Bengalis also practice Islam. Chinese ethnic minorities generally practice traditional Chinese religions. Traditional indigenous beliefs are practiced widely among smaller ethnic groups in the highland regions. Practices drawn from those indigenous beliefs persist widely in popular Buddhist rituals, especially in rural areas.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Highly authoritarian military regimes have ruled the country since 1962. The current military Government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has governed without a Constitution or legislature since 1988. Most adherents of religious groups that register 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 religious freedom.

Since independence in 1948, many of the ethnic minority areas have served as bases for armed resistance against the Government. Although the Government negotiated cease-fire agreements with most armed ethnic groups after 1989, active Shan, Karen, and Karenni insurgencies continued. Periodic fighting between the army and the leading Karen insurgent group, the Karen National Union (KNU), and multiple army attacks on Karen villages occurred. Successive civilian and military governments have tended to view religious freedom in the context of whether it threatens national unity or central authority.

The country has no official state religion. However, since independence, successive governments, civilian and military, have supported and associated themselves conspicuously with Buddhism. In 1961 the Government's push to make Buddhism the state religion failed due to country-wide protests by religious minorities. However, in practice the Government continues to show a preference for Theravada Buddhism through its official propaganda and state-sponsored activities, including Government donations to monasteries and support for Buddhist missionary activities. Promotions within the military and the civil service are generally contingent on the candidates being followers of Buddhism. The Ministry of Religious Affairs includes the powerful Department for the Promotion and Propagation of Sasana (Buddhist teaching).

State-controlled news media frequently depict or describe 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 feature front-page banner slogans quoting from Buddhist scriptures. The Government has published books of Buddhist religious instruction.

Buddhist doctrine remains part of the state-mandated curriculum in all Government-run elementary schools. Students can opt out of instruction in Buddhism and

sometimes did. All students of Government-run schools are required to recite a Buddhist prayer daily. Some Muslim students are allowed to leave the room during this recitation, while at some schools non-Buddhists are forced to recite the prayer.

The Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana handles the Government's relations with Buddhist monks and Buddhist schools. The Government continues to fund two state Sangha universities in Rangoon and Mandalay to train Buddhist monks under the control of the state-sponsored State Monk Coordination Committee ("Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee" or SMNC). The Government-funded International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Rangoon, which opened in 1998, has as its stated purpose "to share the country's knowledge of Buddhism with the people of the world." The main language of instruction is English. The Government also funds one university intended to teach non-citizens about Theravada Buddhism.

Since the 1960s Christian and Islamic groups have had difficulty importing religious literature into the country. All publications, religious and secular, remain subjected to control and censorship. It is illegal to import translations of the Bible in indigenous languages. Officials have occasionally allowed local printing or photocopying of limited copies of religious materials, including the Qur'an (with the notation that they were for internal use only) in indigenous languages without prior approval by Government censors.

Virtually all organizations, religious or otherwise, must register with the Government. A Government directive exempts "genuine" religious organizations from official registration; however, in practice only registered organizations can buy or sell property or open bank accounts. These requirements lead most religious organizations to seek registration. Religious organizations register with the Ministry of Home Affairs with the endorsement of the Ministry for Religious Affairs. Leaders of registered religious groups have more freedom to travel than leaders of unrecognized organizations and members of their congregations.

Religious affiliation is indicated on Government-issued identification cards that citizens and permanent residents of the country are required to carry at all times. Citizens are also required to indicate their religion on official application forms, such as passports

Muslims across the country, as well as some other ethnic minority groups such as Chinese and Indians, are required to obtain advance permission from the township authorities whenever they wish to leave their hometowns.

Muslims in Rakhine State, on the western coast, and particularly those of the Rohingya minority group, continued to experience the severest forms of legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination. The Government denies citizenship status to Rohingyas because their ancestors allegedly did not reside in the country at the start of British colonial rule, as required by the country's citizenship law. The Muslims assert that their presence in the area predates the British arrival by several centuries. On April 2, 2007, five U.N. Special Rapporteurs and an Independent Expert called on the Government to repeal or amend its 1982 Citizenship Law to insure compliance with international human rights obligations. Without citizenship status, Rohingyas do not have access to secondary education in state-run schools because the Government reserves secondary education for citizens only,

Since 1988 the Government permits only three marriages per year per village in the primarily Rohingya townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung in northern Rakhine State, and requires the approval of the Regional Military Commander.

Muslims in the country also have difficulty obtaining birth certificates. A local official in Sittwe, Rakhine State, reportedly issued a verbal order in 2005 prohibiting the issuance of birth certificates to Muslim babies born in the area.

There are still original-resident Muslims living in Thandwe, but newcomers who are Muslim are not allowed to buy property or reside in the township. Muslims are not permitted to live in Gwa or Taungup.

Official public holidays include numerous Buddhist holy days, as well as a few Christian, Hindu, and Islamic holy days.

The Government made some nominal efforts to promote mutual understanding among practitioners of different religious groups.

In October 2006 Minister of Religious Affairs Brigadier General Thura Myint Maung, invited leaders from the four main religious groups (Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Hindu) to a meeting in which the Minister denounced the *2006 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*. He told the religious leaders they knew there was freedom of religion in the country and claimed the Government always granted permits for religious gatherings and permitted renovations of mosques and churches. The Muslim leaders reportedly asked the Minister to unseal mosques in the central region that the Government closed following communal riots in earlier years and for permission to complete madrassahs that were under construction. The

leaders reportedly were required to sign statements that they enjoyed religious freedom and were requested to write a letter stating that their religious communities were allowed to practice their faith freely in the country, which the ministry would display on its official Web site. During a discussion that followed, the representatives of the Islamic Religious Affairs Council (IRAC) stated that while there had been progress on some religious matters, there was room for further improvement. The Minister reportedly stopped further discussion and adjourned the meeting abruptly.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to show preference for Theravada Buddhism while controlling the organization and restricting the activities and expression of the Buddhist clergy (Sangha), although some monks have resisted such control. Based on the 1990 Sangha Organization Law, the Government banned any organization of Buddhist monks other than the nine state-recognized monastic orders. These nine orders submit to the authority of the SMNC, the members of which are indirectly elected by monks. Violations of this ban are punishable by immediate public defrocking, and often by criminal penalties.

According to state-owned media reports, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a Government-sponsored mass organization in which participation often is compulsory, organized courses in Buddhist culture attended by millions of persons. It was not possible to verify this claim independently.

There are reports that the ITBMU, while in principle open to the public, accepted only candidates who were approved by Government authorities or recommended by a senior, pro-Government Buddhist abbot.

The Government infiltrated or monitored the meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. The meetings and activities of religious groups were also subject to broad Government restrictions on freedom of expression and association. The Government subjected all media, including religious publications, and on occasion sermons, to control and censorship.

During the reporting period, the Government harassed a group of Buddhist worshippers who visited the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon every Tuesday, the day of the week that Aung San Suu Kyi was born, to pray at the Tuesday pillar for her release and the release of all political prisoners in the country. Authorities sometimes used the pro-regime USDA to block the group from entering the pagoda grounds and make them pray outside the entrance or to shout and clap loudly to drown out their prayers. After Naw Ohn Hla, the spokesperson for the worshippers, protested to the pagoda authorities and wrote letters to regime leaders, local authorities again allowed the group access to the pagoda to pray; however, authorities ordered the pagoda janitors to throw buckets of water on the platform around the Tuesday pillar so that the worshippers would have to kneel in water. They also played music through loudspeakers at full volume to drown out the sound of the group's prayers. Despite official harassment, including physical and verbal abuse by the pro-regime USDA and the People's Militia, the worshippers continued to pray every Tuesday during the reporting period. In May 2007 many more groups began praying at different pagodas on Tuesdays for Aung San Suu Kyi's release upon expiration of her detention order on May 27.

Authorities frequently refused to approve requests for gatherings to celebrate traditional Christian and Islamic holidays and restricted the number of Muslims that could gather in one place. For instance, in satellite towns surrounding Rangoon, Muslims are only allowed to gather for worship and religious training during the major Muslim holidays. In late 2006 a prominent Muslim religious organization planned to hold a golden jubilee in Mawlamyine, Mon State, to celebrate the founding of their organization. After they requested permission to hold the event, the local Division Commander, Brigadier General Thet Naing Win, called representatives of all non-Buddhist religious organizations in the area to a meeting. He informed them that permission would not be granted to hold any religious functions or ceremonies due to security reasons. The Muslim organization then altered its plans and held a low-profile ceremony to honor pilgrims who had been granted official permission by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to attend the Hajj.

On March 22, 2007, authorities detained Htin Kyaw, when he publicly protested the denial of his religious freedom to become a monk. Htin Kyaw had participated in earlier demonstrations against deteriorating economic and social conditions. Rangoon authorities then enforced a 1995 prohibition against any opposition political party member from being ordained as a monk or religious leader and forbade the abbot of a monastery in North Okkalapa in Rangoon to ordain Htin Kyaw.

On January 23, 2007, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) released a report that documented the Government's restrictions, discrimination, and persecution

against Christians in the country for more than a decade. Subsequently, the Ministry of Religious Affairs pressured religious organizations in the country to publish statements in Government-controlled media denying they had any connection with CSW or to condemn the report, and to reject the idea that religious discrimination existed in the country.

The Government continued to discriminate against members of minority religious groups, restricting their educational, proselytizing, and church-building activities.

Government authorities continued to prohibit Christian clergy from proselytizing in some areas. Christian groups reported that several times during the period covered by this report, local authorities denied applications for residency permits of known Christian ministers attempting to move into a new township. The groups indicated this was not a widespread practice, but depended on the individual community and local authority. In some instances, local authorities reportedly confiscated National Identity Cards of new converts to Christianity. Despite this, Christian groups reported that church membership grew, even in predominately Buddhist regions of the country.

During the reporting period, authorities in the Rangoon area closed several house churches because they did not have proper authorization to hold religious meetings. Other Rangoon home churches remained operational only after paying bribes to local officials. At the same time, the authorities made it difficult, although not impossible, to obtain approval for the construction of "authorized" churches.

On October 1, 2006, the Agape Zomi Baptist Church, with more than 1,000 members, had to stop its weekly services at Asia Plaza Hotel in Rangoon after the hotel management refused to continue renting them a conference room. The hotel management claimed the township authorities had ordered them to stop renting its facility to the group, which had worshipped at the hotel for approximately 1 year.

In August 2006 NaSaKa, the Government's border security force, ordered eight Rohingya Muslim communities in Rathedaung Township, Rakhine State to close their religious centers, including 5 mosques, 4 madrassahs, 18 moqtobs (premadrassahs), and 3 hafez khanas (Qur'an reciting centers). Later, local authorities allowed two madrassahs to reopen. NaSaKa ordered the closures because it stated that the institutions were not officially registered. According to Muslim sources, Government officials have not allowed any madrassahs to register officially. Muslim religious organizations are appealing the closures.

On August 19, 2006, Government officials prohibited a Baptist church in Rangoon from conducting a literacy workshop for its youth. The authorities stated that the church must seek advance permission to hold such programs, although the church had held similar programs for the past 4 years without needing permission. Authorities also reportedly censored the same Baptist church's weekly order of service.

In February 2006 Insein Township authorities also ordered a Chin evangelist to stop holding worship services in his house church in Aung San ward. In November 2005 authorities in Insein Township, Rangoon, pressured evangelical Christians of the 20-year-old Phawkkan Evangelical Church to sign "no worship" agreements. Some signed the agreements out of fear, but others refused. In February 2006 the authorities issued an order banning worship at the church.

The Religious Affairs Ministry has stipulated in the past that permission to construct new religious buildings "depends upon the population of the location;" however, there appeared to be no correlation between the construction of pagodas and the demand for additional places of Buddhist worship. In most regions of the country, Christian and Islamic groups that sought to build small places of worship on side streets or other inconspicuous locations were able to do so only with informal approval from local authorities; however, informal approval from local authorities created 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, authorities demolished existing church buildings.

Christian groups continued to have trouble obtaining permission to buy land or build new churches in most regions. Sometimes the authorities refused because they claimed the churches did not possess proper property deeds, but access to official land titles was extremely difficult due to the country's complex land laws and Government title to most land. In some areas, permission to repair existing places of worship was easier to acquire. Muslims reported that the authorities banned them from constructing new mosques anywhere in the country, and they had great difficulty obtaining permission to repair or expand their existing structures. Historical mosques in Mawlamyine, Mon State, Sittwe, Rakhine State, and other areas of the country continued to deteriorate because authorities would not allow routine maintenance. Some authorities reportedly destroyed informal houses of worship or unauthorized religious construction they discovered. In early 2007, Muslims in Northern Rakhine State, repaired a mosque that had been severely damaged in a storm.

When the authorities discovered this, they destroyed the repairs that had been made to the mosque. Buddhist groups have not experienced similar difficulties in obtaining permission to build new pagodas, monasteries, or community religious halls.

During the reporting period, the Catholic Church established new dioceses in Kachin and Shan states. The bishop of the new diocese in Pekon, Shan State, decided to build his residence on a plot of land long owned by the church. Brigadier General Myo Lwin, commander of Military Operation Command Seven at Pekon, ordered the partially built structure demolished, confiscated the land, and extended his own compound fence to enclose the church property. Despite appeals to higher authorities, the Church has not recovered its property.

The Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) in Insein Township, Rangoon is the premier seminary for Baptists throughout the country. To accommodate a rapidly increasing enrollment, MIT raised funds to build a new classroom building and purchase building supplies. At the last minute, Government officials refused to grant a building permit. Four years later, piles of construction materials still litter the campus where they gather mildew and rust. In contrast, the Government openly supports Buddhist seminaries and permits them to build large campuses.

Some Christians in Chin State claimed that the authorities have not authorized the construction of any new churches since 1997. However, newly built churches are evident in several parts of the state. A Christian leader in Chin State stated that to obtain permission to repair or build a church he first had to obtain permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs (NaTaLa), the Immigration Department and the Township Peace and Development Committee. In Rangoon, Mandalay, and elsewhere, authorities allowed construction of new community centers by various Christian groups only if they agreed not to hold services there or erect Christian signs.

It remained extremely difficult for Muslims to get permission to repair existing mosques, although internal renovations were allowed in some cases. In some parts of Rakhine State, authorities cordoned off mosques and forbade Muslims to worship in them.

State censorship authorities continued to enforce special restrictions on local publication of the Bible, the Qur'an, and Christian and Islamic publications in general. The most onerous restriction was a list of more than 100 prohibited words that the censors would not allow in Christian or Islamic literature because they are "indigenous terms" or derived from the Pali language long used in Buddhist literature. Many of these words have been used and accepted by some of the country's Christian and Islamic groups since the colonial period. Organizations that translate and publish non-Buddhist religious texts were appealing these restrictions. In addition, censors have sometimes objected to passages of the Old Testament and the Qur'an that they believe approve the use of violence against nonbelievers. There have been no reports of arrests or prosecutions for possession of any traditional religious literature in recent years.

Authorities also restricted the quantity of bibles and Qur'ans brought into the country. During the reporting period, however, individuals continued to carry Bibles and Qur'ans into the country in small quantities for personal use. There were no reports that authorities intercepted or confiscated Qur'ans at border entry points, but religious leaders complained that postal workers steal them to sell on the black market.

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 affiliated mostly with Christian religious organizations. The Government is not known to have paid any compensation in connection with these extensive confiscations. Christian groups, including Catholics and Protestants, have brought in foreign clergy and religious workers for visits as tourists, but they have been careful to ensure that the Government did not perceive their activities as proselytizing. Some Christian theological seminaries also continued to operate, as did several Bible schools and madrassahs. The Government has allowed some members of foreign religious groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), to enter the country to provide humanitarian assistance or English language training to Government officials. Some of these groups did not register with the Myanmar Council of Churches, but were able to conduct religious services without Government interference.

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 the country's restrictive passport and visa issuance practices,

foreign exchange controls, and Government monitoring, which 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. In 2006 Government officials allowed approximately 3,000 Muslims to participate in the Hajj. The procedure reportedly became more cumbersome in 2006 due to the relocation of most Government offices from Rangoon to Nay Pyi Taw. Observers speculate that had this not been the case, more Muslims would have gone. During the period covered by this report, immigration and passport officials continued to use the occasion of the Hajj to extort bribes from would-be travelers. Government and private travel agencies processed approximately 2,500 Buddhist pilgrims to travel to Bodhgaya in India.

Non-Buddhists continued to experience employment discrimination at upper levels of the public sector. Few have ever been promoted to the level of Director General or higher. There were no non-Buddhists who held flag rank in the armed forces, although a few Christians reportedly achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The Central Executive Committee of the largest opposition group—the National League for Democracy—also included no non-Buddhists, although individual members from most religious groups in the country supported the party. The Government discouraged Muslims from enlisting in the military, and Christian or Muslim military officers who aspired for promotion beyond the rank of major were encouraged by their superiors to convert to Buddhism. Some Muslims who wished to join the military reportedly had to list "Buddhist" as their religion on their application, though they were not required to convert.

Rohingya Muslims, although essentially treated as illegal foreigners, were not issued Foreigner Registration Cards. Instead, the Government gave some of them "Temporary Registration Cards" (TRC). UNHCR estimated that only 650,000 of the approximately 800,000 Rohingyas possessed TRCs. Authorities have insisted that Muslim men applying for TRCs submit photos without beards. The authorities did not allow Government employees of the Islamic faith, including village headmen, to grow beards, and dismissed some who already had beards. The authorities also did not consider many non-Rohingya Muslims to be citizens. In order for these Muslims to receive National Registration Cards and passports, they must pay large bribes. Ethnic Burman Muslims pay less than Muslims from ethnic minority groups (primary those of Indian or Bengali descent).

In 2006 a prominent Muslim religious organization asked the Rakhine State Peace and Development Council Chairman, the Regional Military Commander, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to lift marriage restrictions for Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State. At the end of the reporting period, they had yet to receive a response.

In Rangoon, Muslims can usually obtain birth certificates for newborns, but local authorities refused to allow them to place the names of the babies on their household registers.

Authorities generally did not grant permission to Rohingya or Muslim Arakanese to travel from their hometowns for any purpose; however, permission was sometimes obtainable through bribery. Non-Arakanese Muslims were given more freedom to travel; however, they were also required to seek permission, which was usually granted after a bribe is paid. Muslims residing in Rangoon could visit beach resort areas in Thandwe, Rakhine State, but could not return to Rangoon without the signature of the Regional Military Commander. Those with money were able to bribe local officials to return. Muslims residing outside of Rakhine State often were barred from return travel to their homes if they visit other parts of Rakhine State.

Rohingyas did not have access to state-run schools beyond primary education and were unable to obtain employment in any civil service positions. Muslim students from Rakhine State who completed high school were not granted permits to travel outside the state to attend college or university. In lieu of a diploma, Rohingya high school graduates received a sheet of paper that stated they would receive a diploma upon presentation of a citizenship card; however, Rohingyas can never obtain such a card.

Many of the approximately 25,000 Rohingya Muslims remaining in refugee camps in Bangladesh refused to return because they feared human rights abuses, including religious persecution.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), has been in prison or house arrest since 2003, when 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 coun-

try. The Government reportedly used criminals dressed in monks' robes in the ambush. On May 15, authorities detained more than 30 worshippers in Rangoon when they approached separate pagodas to pray for Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. At the end of the reporting period, the worshippers were still detained. The next day USDA members, claiming to represent "the people," detained another 15 worshippers after they prayed at a pagoda in Mingladon Township, but the authorities let them go the same day. On May 25, 2007, the Government extended Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest for an additional year.

In February 2007 the Burmese Army arrested a monk who was allegedly trading Buddha images to Buddhists in Bangladesh illegally. The army forced the monk to disrobe in contravention to Buddhist precepts that require a monk to have his robes removed at a ceremony in a monastery. Laypersons, regardless of status, may not demote a monk to become a layperson.

On July 2, 2006, authorities from Thandwe, Rakhine State arrested Abbot Wila Tha and his assistant Than Kakesa from the Buddhist monastery of U Shwe Maw village, Taungup Township, closed the monastery, and forced 59 monks and novices to leave. Local sources claimed that the reason for the arrest was that the abbot refused to accept donations from or conduct religious ceremonies for the authorities. The authorities also claimed the abbot was endangering local stability by talking to the monks and novices about democracy, that he was a supporter of the NLD (National League for Democracy), and that he had supported the visit of Aung San Suu Kyi (pro-democracy activist and leader of the NLD) when she visited the area several years earlier. The exile-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) estimated there were 86 Buddhist monks in prison for various charges. It was not possible to verify the AAPP estimate. The number of non-Buddhists in prison for their religious beliefs was unknown. Authorities usually defrocked monks when they arrested them and treated them like ordinary prisoners, including using torture. The prison authorities disrespectfully addressed the monks by their given names, not their religious titles.

Local civilian and military authorities continued to take actions against Christian groups: arresting clergy, closing home churches, and prohibiting religious services.

In February 2006, police at Hpa-an, Karen State, arrested Yeh Zaw, a member of the Phawkkan Evangelical Church. Yeh Zaw had earlier written a letter to the regime leader urging him to end the persecution of his church that Rangoon authorities closed earlier in 2006, banning members from worshipping there. Police charged him with traveling without an identity card.

In 2005 local authorities in the Chin State capital of Hakha notified Baptist leaders that they would be forced to relocate an active, historic cemetery from church property to a remote location outside of town. Religious leaders reported that authorities continued to forcefully relocate cemeteries in many parts of the country.

In the past, pagodas or Government buildings often have been built on confiscated Muslim land.

In Kachin State, authorities have constructed Buddhist shrines in Christian communities where few or no Buddhists reside and have tried to coerce Christians into forced labor to carry bricks and other supplies for the shrine's construction. In September 2006 Government officials inaugurated a pagoda near the Kachin Independence Organization's headquarters at Laiza, Kachin State. Kachin sources reported there were no Buddhists living in the community. In northern Rakhine State, authorities frequently forced Rohingyas to help construct Buddhist shrines, even though Buddhists there account for approximately 2 percent of the population.

In January 2006 Muslim Rohingyas from at least 10 surrounding villages claimed the military forced them to carry building supplies for three model villages at Padauk Myin, Mala Myin and Thaza Myin in Rathedaung Township. Certain townships in the Rakhine State, such as Thandwe, Gwa, and Taungup, were declared "Muslim-free zones" by Government decree in 1983.

Authorities have attempted to prevent Chin Christians from practicing their religion. In 2005 the military commander in Matupi Township, Chin State, ordered the destruction of a 30-foot cross erected on a hillside with Government permission in 1999. A more senior military official subsequently told local church authorities that they could get permission to reconstruct the cross; however, the local pastors have thus far refused to ask for such authorization. In the past, these crosses often have been replaced with pagodas, sometimes built with forced labor.

SPDC authorities continued to "dilute" ethnic minority populations by encouraging, or even forcing, Buddhist Burmans to relocate to ethnic areas. In predominantly Muslim northern Rakhine State, authorities established "model villages" to relocate released ethnic Burman criminals from other parts of the country.

There continued to be credible reports from diverse regions of the country that Government officials compelled persons, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, espe-

cially in rural areas, to contribute money, food, or materials to state-sponsored projects to build, renovate, or maintain Buddhist religious shrines or monuments. The Government denied that it used coercion and called these contributions "voluntary donations" consistent with Buddhist ideas of making merit. In April 2006 authorities in Lashio reportedly tried to coerce merchants to contribute large sums to construct a Buddhist shrine. Christian merchants refused to participate and the funds raised were well below the authorities' target.

Forced Religious Conversion

Muslim and Christian community leaders reported that during the period covered by this report, authorities had moved away from a campaign of forced conversion to Buddhism and instead focused on enticing non-Buddhists to convert to Buddhism by offering charity or bribery. Conversion of non-Buddhists, coerced or otherwise, is part of a longstanding Government campaign to "Burmanize" ethnic minority regions. This campaign has coincided with increased military presence and pressure. In 2005 there was a single, unverified report of forced conversion at gunpoint in Chin State; however, Christian groups reported that such violent cases were less frequent than in earlier years. In September 2006 Chin sources reported that 15 students withdrew from a Government-operated hostel for girls in Matupi, Chin State, after formerly voluntary Buddhist evening prayers became compulsory for all the hostel residents. Although the girls received free school fees, food, and accommodation, they complained they felt pressured to become Buddhist. In Kanpetlet, Chin State, NaTaLa operated a school exclusively for Buddhist students and guaranteed them Government jobs after graduation. Christian children had to agree to convert to Buddhism if they wanted to attend this school.

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 return to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Preferential treatment for Buddhists and widespread prejudice against ethnic Indians, particularly ethnic Rohingya Muslims, were key sources of social tensions between the Buddhist majority and Christian and Muslim minorities.

In February 2006, violent clashes broke out between Muslims and Buddhists in Magway Division in response to rumors that Muslim men had raped a Burman woman. Ethnic Burmans attacked and torched Muslim and ethnic Indian homes, shops, and mosques. Rioting and looting spread to surrounding towns, including Chauk and Salin. Local security forces did not intervene at first, but as violence spread authorities imposed a strict curfew in several towns. Reliable sources stated that the authorities arrested 17 people in Sinbyukyun and another 55 persons in Chauk, mostly Muslims. Unofficial sources claimed that 3 people died and another 10 were injured in the riots. Three mosques in Yenangyaung, Chauk, and Saku were reportedly destroyed in the violence. At the end of the reporting period, the mosques remained sealed and authorities would not permit Muslims to rebuild them, nor did authorities conduct inquiries into the attacks. Christians reported that an entire Muslim village fled to the monastery of a trusted Buddhist abbot near Shwe Settaw to seek refuge during the riots.

These attacks follow earlier communal violence in Kyauk Pyu, Rakhine State, in 2005. During several days of violence, two Muslims were killed and one Buddhist monk was severely injured. Some Islamic groups blamed the Government for trying to increase tensions between Buddhists and Muslims as part of a "divide and rule" strategy.

Since 1994, when Buddhist members split away from the KNU (Karen National Union) to organize the pro-Government Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), there have been armed conflicts between the DKBA and the predominately Christian antigovernment KNU. Although the DKBA reportedly includes some Christians and there are some Buddhists in the KNU, the armed conflict between the two Karen groups has had strong religious overtones. There were also unverified reports that DKBA authorities continued to expel villagers who converted to Christianity.

During the reporting period, a Burmese language document surfaced titled, "Program to Eliminate Christianity." The document suggested 17 points for countering Christianity in the country; however, the source of the document was unknown and several grammatical errors raised questions about its authenticity. There was no definite evidence to link the document to the Government.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Government restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and movement, including diplomatic travel, made it difficult to obtain timely and accurate information on human rights in the country, including on 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 U.S. Government continued to promote religious freedom in its contacts with all sectors of society, as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, Embassy officials discussed the importance of improved religious freedom with Government and military officials, private citizens, scholars, representatives of other governments, and international business and media representatives. Embassy representatives met regularly with leaders of Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic religious groups, including ethnic minority religious leaders, members of the faculties of schools of theology, and other religious-affiliated organizations and NGOs. This included regular invitations to the American Chargé d'Affaires' residence to build understanding and tolerance among the groups.

Through outreach and traveling, when not blocked by regime officials, Embassy representatives offered support to local NGOs and religious leaders and exchanged information with many otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders. Representatives of the Rohingya minority participated in English language and current events studies at the Embassy's American Center. The American Center regularly translated statements and reports by the U.S. Government and various NGOs on violations of religious freedom in the country and distributed them via its frequently visited library. The U.S funded an effort for UNHCR to initiate work with the Ministry of Immigration and Population to issue TRCs, fairly and without bribes or unreasonable requirements, to undocumented Rohingyas. In addition, the Embassy worked closely with Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian NGOs involved in education and teacher training.

Since 1999 the Secretary of State has designated the country as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Because of the country's poor human rights situation, including its abuses of religious freedom, the United States imposed extensive sanctions on the regime. The United States has also opposed all assistance to the Government by international financial institutions and urged the Governments of other countries to take similar actions. U.S. sanctions include a ban on imports from the country, a ban on the export of financial services to the country, a ban on bilateral aid to the Government, a ban on the export of arms to the country, and a suspension of General System of Preferences (GSP) benefits and Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the U.S. Export-Import Bank (EXIM) financial services in support of U.S. investment and exports to the country. The U.S. Government also ended active promotion of trade with the country, limited the issuance of visas to high-ranking Government and military officials and their immediate family members, and froze SPDC assets in the United States. New investment in the country by U.S. citizens has been prohibited since May 1997.

CAMBODIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Buddhism is the state religion.

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

There were limited reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 67,000 square miles, and a population of approximately 14.1 million. An estimated 93 percent of the population is Theravada Buddhist. The Theravada Buddhist tradition is widespread and strong 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 gen-

erally is considered intrinsic to the country's ethnic and cultural identity. The Mahayana branch of Buddhism is practiced by approximately 150,000 followers and has 63 temples throughout the country.

There are approximately 500,000 to 700,000 Muslims (between 3.5 to 5 percent of the population), predominantly ethnic Cham, who generally are found in towns and rural fishing villages on the banks of the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers and in Kampot Province. Some organizations that work with or have contacts in the Cham Muslim population cite lower estimates for the number of Cham Muslims in the country. A nationwide census scheduled for 2008 should provide a more accurate estimate. There are four branches of Islam represented: the Malay-influenced Shafi'i branch, practiced by 88 percent of Cham Muslims; the Saudi-Kuwaiti-influenced Salafi (sometimes called "Wahhabi") branch, which claims 6 percent of the Muslim population although this number is increasing; the indigenous Iman-San branch, practiced by 3 percent; and the Kadiani branch, which also contributes 3 percent. There are 200 to 300 mosques of the four main branches and 200 to 300 small Surav mosques, which have congregations of up to 40 persons and do not have a min-bar from which Friday sermons are given. The small, but growing, Christian community constitutes approximately 2 percent of the population. There are an estimated 100 Christian organizations or denominations that operate freely throughout the country and include approximately 2,400 churches; however, only 900 of these churches are officially registered. Other religious organizations with small followings include the Vietnamese Cao Dai religion and the Baha'i Faith, each with an estimated 2,000 practicing members.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely. A June 26, 2007, announcement by the Ministry of Cults and Religions restated a 2003 ban on door-to-door proselytizing and similar proselytizing activities such as using a loudspeaker or directing assistance only to denomination members. However, open-ended assistance activities by missionary groups are encouraged.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government does not tolerate abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors. However, Buddhism is the state religion. The Government promotes national Buddhist holidays, provides Buddhist training and education to monks and others in pagodas, and modestly supports an institute that performs research and publishes materials on Khmer culture and Buddhist traditions. The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The law requires all religious groups, including Buddhist groups, to submit applications to the Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs if they wish to construct places of worship and conduct religious activities. In their applications, groups must state clearly their religious purposes and activities, which must comply with provisions forbidding religious groups from insulting other religious groups, creating disputes, or undermining national security. However, there is no penalty for failing to register, and in practice some groups do not.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that any religious groups encountered significant difficulties in obtaining approval for construction of places of worship. The Directive on Controlling External Religions requires registration of places of worship and religious schools, in addition to Government approval prior to constructing new places of worship. Places of worship must be located at least 2 kilometers from each other and may not be used for political purposes or to house criminals or fugitives from the law. The distance limitation has begun to be enforced but applies only to new construction of places of worship and not to offices of religious organizations. The order requires that religious teachings respect other religious groups.

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

The Constitution designates Buddhism as the state religion. The Government permits Buddhist religious instruction in public schools as an extension of this constitutional designation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Despite re-issuance in June 2007 of a ban on door-to-door proselytizing, foreign missionary groups generally operated freely throughout the country and did not encounter significant difficulties in performing their work. Government officials ex-

pressed appreciation for the work of many foreign religious groups in providing much needed assistance in education, rural development, and training; however, officials also expressed some concern that foreign groups used the guise of religion to become involved in illegal or political affairs. During the reporting period, the Government did not close any Islamic schools (*madrassahs*) as it had in the past.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were limited reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

On the morning of April 26, 2006, a Buddhist mob knocked down and burned an unfinished Christian church in Kandal Province. Reportedly, provincial authorities had denied the Wesleyan Church permission to build a church, so the group built a house for religious teachers to be converted to a church at a later date. The district governor of the area reportedly negotiated a reconciliation agreement between the Buddhists and Christians in the area, whereby the house could be rebuilt and no charges pressed against those who participated in the riot. The local church leader confirmed that the house had not been rebuilt but he planned to turn the property into a school.

Minority religious groups experienced little or no societal discrimination during the period covered by this report; however, Muslims and Christians reported minor conflicts.

Occasional tensions were reported among the branches of Islam that receive monetary support from groups in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Malaysia, or Indonesia, depending on the tenets of the branch. Some Buddhists also expressed concern about the Cham Muslim community receiving financial assistance from foreign countries. However, in general, Cham Muslims were well integrated into society, enjoyed positions of prominence in business and the Government, and faced no reported acts of discrimination or abuse during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives met with religious leaders on these issues and contacted representatives of religious nongovernmental organizations and other groups representing the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian religious groups.

In 2006 the Embassy continued its Muslim outreach efforts, which provide for additional channels of information on the status of religious freedom in the country among the Muslim population while also providing material assistance. In 2006 the Embassy continued to provide financial support for the Cham Muslim radio hour which provides a forum for discussion of religious and other issues and is the only Cham language radio program in the country.

Similarly, the Embassy has worked to maintain close contacts with the Buddhist and Christian religious communities through visits to wats (Buddhist temples) and churches and through joint programs. The highest profile Embassy visit to a Buddhist temple in 2006 occurred in September when the Ambassador and the Cambodian Minister of Culture signed an agreement at Wat Han Chey for the U.S. Government to provide funding to restore a pre-Angkorian temple located in the wat's community.

CHINA (TAIWAN ONLY)

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

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Taiwan has an area of 13,800 square miles and a population of 23 million. The 2006 Government Information Office Yearbook, the Religious Affairs Section of the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) states that 35 percent of the population consider themselves Buddhist and 33 percent Taoist. While the overwhelming majority of religious adherents are either Buddhist or Taoist, many people also consider themselves both Buddhist and Taoist.

In addition to practicing organized religion, many persons also followed a collection of beliefs deeply ingrained in Chinese culture that can be termed "traditional Chinese folk religion." These beliefs may include some aspects of shamanism, ancestor worship, belief in ghosts and other spirits, and animism. Researchers and academics estimate that as much as 80 percent of the population believes in some form of traditional folk religion. Such folk religions may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions.

Traditional Chinese religions with adherents constituting less than 5 percent of the population include: I Kuan Tao, Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor Religion), Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion), Li-ism, Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion), Tian Li Chiao (Tenrikyo), Universe Maitreya Emperor Religion, Hai Tze Tao, Confucianism, Zhonghua Sheng Chiao (Chinese Holy Religion), Da Yi Chiao (Great Changes Religion), Pre-cosmic Salvationism, and Huang Chung Chiao (Yellow Middle Religion).

There also may be an overlap between practitioners of Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions with those of Falun Gong, which is registered as a civic, rather than religious, organization. In Taiwan, Falun Gong is generally considered a spiritual movement and not a religion. The leading proponent of Falun Gong in Taiwan reports that membership exceeds 500,000 and continues to grow rapidly.

In addition to traditional Chinese religions, small percentages of the population consider themselves Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Sunni Muslim. Several foreign missionary religious groups are also present. The Church of Scientology, the Baha'i, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mahikari Religion, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and the Unification Church are registered. Other Christian denominations present include Presbyterians, the True Jesus Church, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, and Episcopalians. Approximately 70 percent of the indigenous population of 475,000 Aborigines is Christian. There are also a small number of adherents of Judaism in Taiwan, mainly expatriates.

While the authorities do not collect or independently verify statistics on religious affiliation, they maintain registration statistics voluntarily reported by religious organizations. Officials from the MOI Religious Affairs Section believe these voluntarily reported statistics significantly understate the number of people in Taiwan who adhere to religious beliefs and participate in some form of religious activities. The MOI Religious Affairs Section estimates that approximately 50 percent of the population regularly participates in some form of organized religious practice, as distinguished from "traditional Chinese folk religions," and an estimated 14 percent of the population is atheist.

Religious beliefs cross political and geographical lines. Members of the political leadership practice various faiths.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Although registration is not mandatory, 26 religious organizations have registered with the MOI's Religious Affairs Section. Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, or the chapter of the Civil Code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship may register with local authorities, many choose not to do so and operate as the personal property of their leaders. Registered religious organizations operate on a tax-free

basis and are required to submit annual reports of their financial operations. The only ramification for nonregistration is the forfeiture of the tax advantages that are available for registered religious organizations. There were no reports that the authorities sought to deny registration to new religions during the period covered by this report.

Religious organizations are permitted to operate schools, but compulsory religious instruction is not permitted in any public or private elementary, middle, or high school accredited by the Ministry of Education (MOE). High schools accredited by the MOE, while not allowed to require religious instruction, may provide elective courses in religious studies, provided such courses do not promote certain religious beliefs over others. Universities and research institutions may have religious studies departments. Before 2004, legislation barred religious schools and theological institutes from applying for MOE accreditation, and the MOE did not recognize university-level degrees granted by these types of schools. In March 2004, the Legislative Yuan revised the Private Schools Act authorized the MOE to establish an accreditation process for university-level religious education institutions supported by religious organizations or private funds. In April 2006, the MOE promulgated regulations governing the accreditation process. In August 2006, the MOE accredited its first seminary, the Dharma Drum Buddhist College.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in Taiwan.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The MOI promotes interfaith understanding among religious groups by sponsoring symposiums or helping to defray the expenses of privately sponsored symposiums on religious issues. The MOI also publishes and updates an introduction to major religious beliefs and groups based on material provided by the groups. This introduction is also available on the Internet. In May 2006, the MOI invited some 100 leaders from religious organizations to participate in a 2-day tour of outstanding social services organizations operated by religious charities, to foster cooperation among organizations with similar social welfare goals. In August 2006, the MOI held its annual ceremony to honor religious groups for their contributions to public service, social welfare, and social harmony. Some 170 different organizations and individuals were recognized. In January, 2007, President Chen personally congratulated local Muslims who had completed a pilgrimage to Mecca, and praised Taiwan's Muslim Association (an organization that is fully independent from the Government) for promoting frequent exchanges between Taiwan and the Islamic world. President Chen also credited practicing Muslims on Taiwan for helping to create a richer, more diverse culture on the island.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Prominent societal leaders also took positive steps to promote religious tolerance. For instance, 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 2006 seminar was held at the Tian Di Jiao temple in Nantou County, and more than 200 college students attended. The Unification Church plans to host the 2007 seminar in Tamshui Town in Taipei County.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

CHINA

Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibetan areas of China are appended at the end of this report.

The Constitution states that citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe in any religion. The Constitution limits protection of the exercise of religious belief to activities which it defines as "normal." The Constitution states that religious bodies and affairs are not to be "subject to any foreign domination." The law also prohibits proselytism.

The Government restricted religious practice largely to Government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and controlled growth and scope of activities of both registered and unregistered religious groups, including "house churches." The Government tried to control and regulate the growth of religious groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Nonetheless, membership in many religious groups was growing rapidly.

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for freedom of religion remained poor, especially for religious groups and spiritual movements that are not registered with the Government. The Government expelled several foreign citizens on charges of conducting "illegal religious activities" by proselytizing in the spring of 2007. According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious organizations, and house church groups, over 100 were expelled. The Government also questioned house church leaders about connections with foreigners and plans to disrupt the Olympics. Some of these groups alleged that these incidents were part of a coordinated Government campaign to repress religious expression. The Government also continued to emphasize the role of religion in building a "Harmonious Society," which was a positive development with regard to the Government's respect for religious freedom.

Members of many unregistered religious groups of various faiths reported that the Government subjected them to restrictions, including intimidation, harassment, and detention. Some unregistered religious groups were pressured to register as "meeting points" of Government-sanctioned "patriotic" religious associations (PRAs) linked to the five main religions—Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. The treatment of unregistered groups varied significantly from region to region.

Religious worship in officially sanctioned and unregistered places of worship continued to grow throughout the country. The extent of religious freedom varied widely within the country. For example, officials in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) tightly controlled religious activity, while elsewhere in the country Muslims enjoyed greater religious freedom. Despite Government statements that minors are free to receive religious training that does not interfere with their secular education, authorities in some areas of Xinjiang failed to enforce these protections and reportedly prevented minors from receiving religious education outside the home. Followers of Tibetan Buddhism, including in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas of the country (see separate appendix), also faced more restrictions on their religious practice and ability to organize than Buddhists in other parts of the country.

There were many reports of repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and house churches during the reporting period. The national religious affairs ministry, known as State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), stated that friends and family holding prayer meetings at home need not register with the Government, but the regulations on religious affairs (RRA) state that formal worship should take place only in Government-approved venues. There were many reports that police and officials of local Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) interfered with house church meetings, sometimes accusing the house church of disturbing neighbors or disrupting social order. Police sometimes detained worshippers attending such services for hours or days and prevented further house worship in the venues. Police interrogated both laypeople and their leaders about their activities at the meeting sites, in hotel rooms, and in detention centers. Leaders sometimes faced harsher treatment, including detention, formal arrest and sentencing to reeducation or imprisonment. Treatment of unregistered groups varied regionally. For example, local officials in Henan Province mistreated unregistered Protestants, and local officials in Hebei Province tightly controlled Roman Catholics loyal to the Vatican.

Some "underground" Catholic bishops also faced repression, in large part due to their avowed loyalty to the Vatican, which the Government accused of interfering in the country's internal affairs.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it designated as "cults," which included several Christian groups and the Falun Gong. The Government has never publicly defined the criteria which it uses for designating a religious group a "cult." Falun Gong practitioners continued to face arrest, detention, and imprisonment, and there were credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons, reeducation through labor camps, and extra-judicial "legal education" centers. Some practitioners who recanted their beliefs returned from detention. Reports of abuse were difficult to confirm within the country and the group engaged in almost no public activity. There were continuing reports that the Government's "610 office," a state security agency implicated in many alleged abuses of Falun Gong practitioners, continued to use extra-legal methods of repression.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetans and Uighurs, experienced 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.

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the consulates general in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made concerted efforts to encourage greater religious freedom in the country. U.S. officials condemned abuses while supporting positive trends within the country. In Washington and in Beijing, U.S. officials positively noted the Government's engagement of religious citizens in building a "Harmonious Society," the state's campaign to alleviate social tensions, and encouraged the Government to engage unregistered religious groups as well as registered religious groups in providing voluntary aid to meet the country's social and economic needs. U.S. officials continued to urge the Government to show greater respect for citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise their religious beliefs. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 3.5 million square miles and a population of approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2005 Government White Paper, there are "more than 100 million religious adherents," representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. There are reportedly more than 100,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, and more than 3,000 religious organizations. A February 2007 survey conducted by researchers in Shanghai and reported in Chinese state-run media concluded that 31.4 percent of Chinese citizens ages 16 and over, or 300 million persons, are religious. This is approximately three times the official figure reported by the Government in April 2005. According to the February 2007 poll, approximately 40 million citizens identify themselves as Christians and 200 million identify themselves as Buddhist, Taoist, or worshippers of "legendary figures."

The Government officially recognizes five main religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. There are five state-sanctioned PRAs that manage the activities of adherents of the five officially-recognized faiths. The Russian Orthodox Church operates in some regions, and expatriates practiced other religions.

According to the Government's 1997 report on Religious Freedom and 2005 White Paper on religion, there are more than 100 million Buddhists. 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 estimated that there are 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries, 200,000 Buddhist monks and nuns, more than 1,700 "reincarnate lamas," and 32 Buddhist schools. Most believers, including most ethnic Han Buddhists, practice Mahayana Buddhism. Most Tibetans and ethnic Mongolians practice Tibetan Buddhism, a Mahayana adaptation. Some ethnic minorities in southwest Yunnan Province practice Theravada Buddhism, the dominant tradition in parts of neighboring Southeast Asia. According to the Government-sanctioned Taoist Association, there are more than 25,000 Taoist priests and nuns, more than 1,500 Taoist temples, and two Taoist schools. Traditional folk religions (worship of local gods, heroes, and ancestors) are practiced by hundreds of millions of citizens and are often affiliated with Taoism, Buddhism, or ethnic minority cultural practices.

According to Government figures, there were as many as 20 million Muslims, more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (more than half of which are in

Xinjiang), more than 45,000 imams nationwide, and 10 Islamic schools. The country has 10 predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, the largest of which is 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, Hebei, and Xinjiang Provinces. Hui slightly outnumber Uighur Muslims, who live primarily in Xinjiang. According to an official 2005 report, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region had 23,900 mosques and 27,000 clerics at the end of 2004, but observers noted that fewer than half of the mosques were authorized to hold Friday prayer and holiday services. The country also has more than 1 million Kazakh Muslims and thousands of Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baoan, and Tatar Muslims.

There are 5.3 million persons registered with the official Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA), and it is estimated that there are an equal or greater number who worship in unregistered Catholic churches affiliated with the Vatican. According to official sources, the Government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association has more than 70 bishops, almost 3,000 priests and nuns, 6,000 churches and meeting places, and 12 seminaries. There are thought to be approximately 40 bishops operating "underground," some of whom are in prison or under house arrest. A Vatican representative estimated that there are 8 to 18 million Catholics in the country

Officials from the Three-Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council (TSPM/CCC), the state-approved Protestant religious organization, estimated that at least 20 million citizens worship in official churches. Government officials stated that there are more than 50,000 registered TSPM churches and 18 TSPM theological schools. According to NGO reports, SARA Director Ye Xiaowen reported to audiences at Beijing University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences that the number of Christians had reached 130 million by the end of 2006, including about 20 million Catholics.

The Falun Gong is a self-described spiritual movement that 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. There are estimated to have been at least 2.1 million adherents of Falun Gong before the Government's harsh crackdown on the group beginning in 1999. There are reliable estimates that hundreds of thousands of citizens still practice Falun Gong privately.

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 Constitution limits protection of religious belief to activities which it defines as "normal." The Constitution also states that rreligious bodies and affairs are not to be "subject to any foreign domination." The Government restricts lawful religious practice largely to Government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and attempts to control the growth and scope of activities of both registered and unregistered religious groups. The Government tries to prevent the rise of religious groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party. Nonetheless, membership in many faiths is growing rapidly.

The Government registers religious organizations, and determines the legality of religious activities. Registered religious groups enjoy legal protections of their religious practices that unregistered religious groups do not receive. The five state-sanctioned PRAs are registered with the Government as religious organizations. SARA monitors and judges whether religious activities are "normal" and therefore lawful. SARA and the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD) provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of 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 Communist Party members. Communist Party members are directed by Party doctrine to be atheists, and their family members are discouraged from public participation in religious ceremonies.

Public security bureau officials monitor religious behavior that violates law or regulation. These officials monitor unregistered facilities, check to see that religious activities do not disrupt public order, and combat groups designated as cults.

The 2005 RRA protect the rights of registered religious groups to possess property, publish literature, train and approve clergy, and collect donations. Comprehensive implementing regulations had not been issued by the end of the period covered by this report, and there was little evidence that the new regulations have expanded religious freedom, because unregistered religious organizations have not been able

to register under the RRA. Therefore, the activities of unregistered religious groups remained outside the scope of the RRA's legal protection.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC) states that registration does not require a congregation to join either the TSPM or the CCC. However, nearly all local RAB officials require registered Protestant congregations and clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. Credentialing procedures effectively required clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC, a practice that appeared unchanged since adoption of the new regulations. Before the passage of the RRA, a few Protestant groups reportedly registered independently of the TSPM/CCC. These included the Local Assemblies Protestant churches in Zhejiang Province (where no significant TSPM/CCC community exists) and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province. It was not clear whether these religious groups registered as meeting points of pre-existing religious organizations or as religious organizations themselves. The (Russian) Orthodox Church has been able to operate without affiliating with a PRA in a few parts of the country.

Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refused to register or affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC. Others did not seek registration independently or with one of the PRAs due to fear of adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders or members. Others state that TSPM theology places submission to the state's authority above submission to Christ's authority and refuse to join on these grounds. Some groups disagreed with the TSPM/CCC teachings that differences in the tenets of different Protestant creeds can be reconciled or accommodated under one "post denominational" religious umbrella organization. Many evangelical house church groups also disagreed with the TSPM's admonitions against proselytism, which they consider a central teaching of Christianity.

Unregistered groups also frequently did not affiliate with one of the PRAs for fear that doing so would allow Government authorities to control sermon content.

During the reporting period, the Government rejected attempts by several unregistered religious groups to register. Some groups reported that authorities denied their applications without cause or detained group members who met with officials when they attempted to register. The Government contended that these refusals were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities or failure to meet other legal requirements. A few unregistered religious groups were able to register as "meeting points" of one of the PRAs.

In order to register a "site for religious activity" or a "meeting point" under the RRA a religious group must also register as a social organization under the "Regulations on the Management of Registration of Social Organizations" (RSO), which are administered by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA). Unregistered religious groups stated that it was difficult to obtain the "sponsorship" of a "qualified supervisory unit" without the support of one of the PRAs. The five PRAs are the only religious organizations known to be registered under the RSO. Religious groups that are not registered under the RSO do not enjoy legal protection and cannot register their own meeting points under the RRA.

The RRA has five requirements for the registration of meeting points or sites for religious activities: First, establishment of the site must be consistent with the overall purpose of the RRA and must not be used to "disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the state" and must not be "subject to any foreign domination." Second, local religious citizens must have a need to carry out collective religious activities frequently. Third, there must be religious personnel qualified to preside over the activities. Fourth, the site must have "necessary funds." Fifth, the site must be "rationally located" so as not to interfere with normal production and neighboring residents. Under the RRA, clergy must report to the Government after being selected pursuant to the rules of the relevant religious association.

SARA considers unregistered churches as existing outside the legal framework of the RRA, although prayer meetings and Bible study groups held among friends and family in homes are legal and do not require registration. SARA has not publicly defined the terms "family and friends." House churches report that local authorities frequently disrupted meetings of friends and family in private homes and arrested participants on the grounds that they were participating in illegal gatherings.

In order to receive tax-free charitable donations, a religious group must register as a charity with MOCA at the national or local level. House church groups and other unregistered religious groups are ineligible to receive tax-free status since they do not have legal status. The only religious group that has registered as a charity at the national level is the Amity Foundation, a state-approved Protestant group. Caritas, the social services branch of the Roman Catholic Church, operates in a few dioceses under the supervision of the CPA.

In 1999 the Government began banning groups that it determined to be "cults," without publicly defining the term. The Government banned the Falun Gong, the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), and Zhong Gong (a qigong exercise discipline). The Government also considers several Protestant Christian groups to be cults, including the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church, Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (also known as San Ba Pu Ren), Association of Disciples, Lord God Sect, Established King Church, Unification Church, the Family of Love, and South China Church.

Under article 300 of the criminal law, "cult" members who "disrupt public order" or distribute publications may be sentenced to 3 to 7 years in prison, while "cult" leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to 7 years or more in prison.

During the period covered by this report, local officials damaged or destroyed several unregistered places of worship. There continues to be a significant shortage of temples, churches, and mosques and many of those that existed were overcrowded and in poor condition.

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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for religious freedom remained poor, especially for members of unregistered religious groups and groups the Government designated as "cults." The Government tends to perceive unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority, and it attempts to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP. In some 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 other regions local officials supervised religion strictly, and authorities placed pressure on unregistered churches and their members. Local regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce vigorously Government policy regarding unregistered churches.

Officials in many locations pressured unregistered religious groups, including house churches, to affiliate with one of the PRAs and register with Government religious affairs authorities. Officials in some areas organized registration campaigns collecting the names, addresses, and sometimes the fingerprints of church leaders and worshippers. Some local authorities continued to harass religious groups that did not register by arresting and interrogating unregistered church leaders. In other regions Government supervision of religious activity was less stringent and registered and unregistered churches coexisted openly. Despite the efforts at control in some areas, official sources, religious professionals, and members of both officially sanctioned and unregistered places of worship reported that the number of religious adherents in the country continued to grow.

Police sometimes closed unregistered places of worship, including Catholic churches and Protestant house churches with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. The Government closed churches in Zhejiang, Jilin, and Fujian Provinces during the reporting period. In some cases local officials destroyed the properties of unregistered religious groups. SARA considers unregistered churches to be illegal, although SARA has stated that prayer meetings and Bible study groups held among friends and family in private homes are legal and do not require registration. In some areas unregistered house churches with hundreds of members met openly with the knowledge of local authorities. In other areas house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends were proscribed. House churches could encounter greater difficulties when their membership grew, when they arranged for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forged links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas. Urban house churches were generally limited to meetings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas could number in the hundreds. It was also difficult for registered groups to register new places of worship, such as churches and mosques, even in areas with growing religious populations.

The Government authorized funding to build new places of worship for congregations affiliated with PRAs.

The Government continued to repress harshly religious groups which it designates cults, including the Falun Gong. As in past years, local authorities took steps to repress unregistered religious groups that grew quickly or publicly rejected the Gov-

ernment's authority. Official tolerance for groups associated with Buddhism and Taoism has been greater than that for groups associated with other religions. Membership in the Falun Gong, the Xiang Gong, Guo Gong, and Zhong Gong qigong groups was still considered illegal. The Government also labeled folk religions as "feudal superstition," and in the past there were reports that followers sometimes were subject to harassment and repression.

Xinjiang authorities continued to use combating terrorism to justify placing restrictions on peaceful religious practices of Uighur Muslims, according to human rights NGOs. Because the Xinjiang authorities often did not distinguish carefully among those involved in peaceful activities in support of independence, "illegal" religious activities, and violent terrorism, it was often difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those seeking to worship, those peacefully seeking political goals, or those engaged in violence. As a result, Xinjiang authorities sometimes erroneously charged religious believers with committing the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. While often targeted at Muslims, this tight control of religion in Xinjiang affected followers of other religions as well. During the reporting period, Xinjiang provincial-level Communist Party and Government officials called for stronger management of religious affairs. In some areas of Xinjiang, officials restricted the building of mosques and the training of clergy and interfered with the teaching of Islam to children outside the home. Muslim teachers, professors, and university students in Xinjiang were not allowed to practice religion openly while on campus. Female university students and professors were discouraged from wearing headscarves. Some ethnic Tajiks in Xinjiang could not attend mosque until over age 30.

The law does not prohibit religious believers from holding public office; however, Communist Party membership is required for almost all high-level positions in Government, state-owned businesses, and many official organizations. Communist Party officials reiterated during the period covered by this report that party membership and religious belief are incompatible. The CCP reportedly has stated that party members who belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion. The "Routine Service Regulations" of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) state explicitly that servicemen "may not take part in religious or superstitious activities." Muslims allegedly have been fired from Government posts for praying during working hours. The Government required students to study the principles of Chinese Communism, an atheistic ideology.

Some Communist Party officials engage in religious activity, most commonly Buddhism or a folk religion. Leaders of Government-approved religious groups, which are included in national and local government organizations usually to represent their constituency on cultural and educational matters, may be members of the CCP. The PRAs are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), an advisory forum that is led by the CCP and consults with social groups outside the Party. The National People's Congress (NPC) included several leaders of registered religious groups. Fu Tieshan, a bishop and vice-chairman of the CPA, was one of the vice chairmen of the NPC Standing Committee until his death in April 2007.

The Government does not have diplomatic relations with the Holy See and generally does not allow the CPA and its clergy to recognize the authority of the pope to make clerical appointments. This remained a significant reason for the persistence of a large unregistered Catholic church that remains unaffiliated with the Government and CPA. Pressure by the CPA on unregistered Catholic bishops to join the official Church continued, and some unregistered priests and bishops were detained. Despite some efforts toward rapprochement between the Government and the Vatican, the Vatican's diplomatic recognition of Taiwan and differences over selection of bishops remained the primary obstacles to improved relations. In January 2007 the Vatican issued an invitation to the Government to enter a dialogue on restoring diplomatic relations and announced that it would set up a permanent commission to handle relations with China. In June 2007 Pope Benedict issued an open letter to Chinese Catholics inviting them to resolve differences and calling on China to engage in "respectful and constructive dialogue" with the Vatican to normalize relations. An MFA spokesperson said that China advocates improvement in Sino-Vatican relations. A leader of the CPA said he hoped the Pope's letter would be of help in establishing China-Vatican ties. In official Catholic churches, clerics lead prayers for the pope and pictures of the pope are displayed. An estimated 90 percent of official Catholic bishops have reconciled with the Vatican.

In January 2007 the Vatican approved the ordination of a mainland-selected Catholic priest to become bishop of Guangzhou Diocese, the first such backing given by the Holy See after bilateral ties were strained with the appointments in April and May 2006 of Bishops Ma Yingling of Kunming, Yunnan Province, and Liu

Xinhong of Wuhu, Anhui Province, without Vatican approval. The Vatican criticized these ordinations as illicit. The CPA and SARA responded that the bishops had been democratically elected by priests of their dioceses, the Vatican was interfering in the country's internal affairs, and the appointments were required to fill vacancies. The disagreement over the appointments of Bishops Ma and Liu disrupted a period during which several bishops were appointed with both Government and Vatican approval. Many priests and bishops publicly acknowledged that the Vatican had approved their appointment. They suffered no punishment for this public stance, although the Government denied that the Vatican played any role in approving the country's clergy.

In fact, the large majority of bishops recognized by the Patriotic Association have been recognized by the Vatican either before or after their appointment by the Government. In a few cases, the bishop named by the state-sanctioned church conflicted directly with a bishop recognized by the Vatican, a situation that contributed significantly to tension between the Patriotic Association and the unregistered Catholic Church and to tension between the Vatican and the Government. The CPA said that 40 of China's nearly 100 dioceses have no bishop in place.

Unregistered groups are not legally permitted to offer theological training. Registered religious groups may sponsor individual students for study at one of the at least 76 Government-recognized training institutions for clergy. 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. Clergy from the PRAs go abroad for studies but sometimes have difficulty obtaining approval to study abroad. In most cases, foreign organizations provide funding for such training programs. Prospective clergy must obtain the sponsorship of a PRA to gain admittance to formal theological schools.

Institutions for religious leaders other than the officially recognized ones exist but cannot register as legal institutions. The quality of education at unregistered institutions varies. Such institutions risk being closed when they come to the attention of local authorities. Officials sometimes refuse to issue passports to religious leaders, especially those from unregistered groups. There is a severe shortage of trained clergy for both the registered and unregistered religious groups.

Senior Government officials claimed that the country has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. Some Xinjiang officials told foreign observers that children under 18 were not permitted to attend religious services in mosques in Xinjiang. Local officials in Xinjiang prevented children from attending worship services in mosques or churches. However, during the reporting period, children were observed attending prayer services at mosques and Sunday schools at TSPM churches in Xinjiang.

Increasing interest in Christianity has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles and other Christian literature. The Government controls publication of all texts, including religious texts. Bibles and sacred texts of other religions may be purchased at bookstores and most officially recognized churches. Nevertheless, members of unregistered churches stated that the supply and distribution of Bibles in some places, particularly rural locations, was inadequate to meet the growing demand. Individuals cannot order Bibles directly from publishing houses, and purchases of large numbers of Bibles could bring unfavorable attention to the purchaser. Customs officials continued to monitor for the "smuggling" of Bibles and other religious materials into the country. Religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qur'ans, may be confiscated and the unauthorized publishing houses closed. Religious adherents are subject to arrest and imprisonment for illegal publishing. Authorities sometimes confiscate Bibles in raids on house churches.

At the 2005 NPC, President Hu Jintao announced a nation-wide campaign to build a "Harmonious Society." During an October 2006 meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, Jia Qinglin, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top advisory body said: "China has engaged itself in building a harmonious society in which religion can play an important role." Jia called upon leaders of the PRAs to encourage their members to increase social services to the country's neediest citizens.

The Roman Catholic Church forbids abortions and the use of artificial contraception. Many Protestant leaders also teach that abortion violates the Biblical commandment not to kill. In many parts of the country, Government population control agencies require women to use contraception and to have an abortion if the pregnancy violates Government population control regulations. In some provinces, Government population control agencies may also forcibly sterilize men and women after they have had their first child. Many Chinese Catholics and Protestants consider the Government's birth limitation laws and policies a violation of their reli-

gious beliefs. In Guangxi Province a Protestant pastor protested when his wife was forced to have an abortion at 7 months. In Shandong Province a Christian woman who was 6 months' pregnant protested against the attempts of family planning officials to force her to have an abortion.

The Government permits Muslims to go on the Hajj to Mecca via the Muslim patriotic religious association, the Islamic Association of China (IAC). The IAC is the only organization that is legally authorized to conduct official Hajj tours. Muslims must apply to the IAC to secure a place on an official tour. Some Uighur Muslims have sought passage to Mecca from points outside the country for a variety of reasons, including to save costs and to avoid cumbersome restrictions and tests of political loyalty by the Government.

According to official reports, approximately 9,700 Chinese Muslims made the Hajj during the 2006–07 pilgrimage. The IAC said this was the highest number of Chinese pilgrims ever to participate in the Hajj. This number did not include participants on "independent hajj tours" for whom there were no official estimates but numbered in the thousands in previous years. In southern Xinjiang the Government reportedly published banners and slogans discouraging Hajj pilgrimages outside those organized by the IAC.

Citizens are not permitted to attend religious services conducted by foreigners. The Government continued to tolerate religious worship by foreigners as long as no citizens were present. The Government has stated it was willing to consider approving new religious organizations outside the five main faiths but had not done so at the end of the reporting period.

Foreigners are forbidden from proselytizing but may attend worship services at meetings points of registered religious groups. Many foreign registered 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. Some foreign church organizations came under pressure to register with Government authorities.

The Government sometimes made political demands on the leadership of registered groups. For example, authorities required clergy to publicly endorse Government policies or denounce Falun Gong. In other areas, including Xinjiang and the TAR, authorities required clergy to participate in patriotic education.

In April 2007 Taoist organizations in China organized an international forum on the "Tao Te Ching" in Xian.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, officials continued to scrutinize, and in some cases, harass unregistered religious and spiritual groups. In some areas Government officials abused the rights of members of unregistered 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.

Religious adherents and members of spiritual movements have been beaten, and some have died in police custody after being detained in connection with their religious belief or practice.

The Government detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms many religious leaders and adherents. The religious adherents claimed that the activities they were arrested for related to their religious practice. However, the Government denied jailing anyone solely because of his or her religion. Local authorities used 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. The Government held many religious adherents and members of spiritual movements in such facilities during the period covered by this report. 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 preached beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine (such as the imminent coming of the Apocalypse or groups that have charismatic leaders) often were singled out for particularly severe harassment. Observers attributed the unorthodox beliefs of some religious groups to the lack of educational opportunities for clergy and the lack of access to sacred religious texts and supplementary readings.

Offenses related to membership in unregistered religious groups are often classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. According to the *Law Yearbook of China*, 8,224 cases of disturbing the social order or cheating by the use of superstition were filed in 2004, of which 8,116 resulted in formal charges, criminal or administrative punishment. However, religious leaders and worshippers faced criminal and administrative punishment on a wide range of charges, including those related

to the Government's refusal to allow members of unregistered groups to assemble, travel, and publish freely or in connection with its ban on proselytizing.

According to reports from foreigners living in the country, religious organizations, and NGOs, including the China Aid Association, a religious freedom advocacy group, the Government expelled as many as 100 foreign Christians from the United States, Australia, Canada, Israel, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, and South Korea in the spring of 2007. As detailed in a July 9, 2007 report by the China Aid Association, the campaign, reportedly called "Typhoon Number Five," was intended to combat infiltration by foreign religious groups and to tighten restrictions on unregistered religious groups. Police interrogated the members and leaders of several house churches in the spring of 2007 about connections with foreigners and potential plans to disrupt the 2008 Olympic Games.

Some Protestant Christians who worshipped outside of Government-approved venues, including in their homes, continued to face detention and abuse, especially for attempting to meet in large groups, traveling within and outside of the country for religious meetings, and otherwise holding peaceful religious assemblies in unregistered venues. Police and other security officials sometimes disrupted Protestant religious meetings.

In the spring of 2007, members of the China House Church Alliance (CHCA), a network of house church groups that reportedly has 300,000 members, were reportedly detained and interrogated, particularly about their connections to foreigners and alleged plans to disrupt the 2008 Olympic Games. The detentions and interrogations took place in Beijing, Jilin, Anhui, and Hunan.

On June 29, 2007, the Shandong Government sentenced Zhang Geming and Sun Qingwen, two house church leaders to 1 year of reeducation through labor each for participation "using an evil cult to obstruct the law." Four other house church leaders who were arrested with them were fined $132 each.

In June 2007 Beijing house church activist Hua Huaiqi was sentenced in a closed trial to 6 months in prison for obstruction of justice. Police reportedly beat him in jail and poured cold water over him in frigid weather. In April 2007 the Beijing Intermediate People's Court rejected the appeal of Shuang Shuying, the 76-year-old mother of Beijing house church activist Hua Huaiqi. Shuang was sentenced to 2 years in jail for destruction of public and private property. She claimed that she was defending herself from being struck by an oncoming police car when her cane struck the headlights of the car. Shuang was placed in a medical center under police surveillance after being sentenced because she suffered from heart problems and diabetes.

In May 2007 police in Aksu City, Xinjiang, arrested approximately 30 house church leaders who met with Christians from the United States. Four American Christians were interrogated in connection with the meeting and later expelled from China. Six of the house church leaders were accused of involvement in "evil cult activities." Eyewitnesses reported that two of the arrested leaders had been physically abused during interrogation.

In April 2007 police in Liaoning Province sentenced Gu Changrong and Gu Zhaohong, brother and sister members of the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), to 1 year terms of reeducation through labor for allegedly telling Liu Changhai, a local Communist Party member, about Christianity. Liu reportedly called the Communist Party Secretary in Qidaohe and complained that the two tried to persuade him to quit the Party and join the Society of Disciples. Police confiscated several Bibles from the home of Gu Zhaohong. A family member alleged that police may have compelled Gu Changrong, who is illiterate, into signing documents admitting guilt. Police did not notify family members of the arrests or sentences.

In March 2007 police in Henan province arrested and detained CHCA Vice President and Pastor Dong Quanyu and his wife, Li Huage, for 10 days for "disturbing public order." Public security bureau officers reportedly beat Li Huage severely. Police also confiscated property from their home.

In March 2007 public security personnel in Zhangshi Village in Henan Province reportedly attacked members of a house church group as they left an Easter service. Members of the group reported that they were forced into police cars, that police detained them without producing arrest warrants and interrogated them for up to 24 hours. Police interrogated three leaders of the group, 71-year-old Ma Wenqing, Zhang Jinzhi, and Zhang Liang, and reportedly stripped two women of their clothing. The detained Christians alleged that police tortured them into confessing that they were members of an evil cult.

In February 2007 police and local RAB officials reportedly raided a prayer meeting held in a private home in Shuanghuang Township, Jiangsu Province. The police photographed those in attendance and took down their names. When some of the individuals refused to give their names, police reportedly beat them. Police forced

the owner of the home, Tan Jianwei, to sign a statement agreeing not to hold religious activities in his home.

In February 2007 officials released Liu Fenggang from prison 6 months before his sentence was set to expire. Liu, Xu Yonghai, and Zhang Shengqiwere imprisoned for allegedly "providing national intelligence to overseas organizations" by reporting a house church destruction case to overseas Christian organizations. During his imprisonment, Liu was hospitalized five times for serious heart disease and diabetes.

In January 2007 police in Anhui province arrested Pastor Chen Jiaxi of Chencun Village for distributing Bibles and Christian literature without charge. Police tried Chen on the charge of "illegal business management."

In November 2006 the Government executed leaders of the Three Grades of Servants Church, which it designated a cult. The leaders, Xu Shuangfu, Zhang Min, Zhu Lixing, and Ben Zhonghai were sentenced to death for alleged murders of members of Eastern Lightning, a religious group that the Government had also designated a cult. Eleven other church members were sentenced to jail terms of 3 to 15 years. Even before the verdict in Xu's case had been announced, Xu's conviction was reportedly introduced as evidence in the trials of other group members, according to reliable reports. Many detained or charged with membership in the cult did not use the name Three Grades of Servants Church but instead asserted they were members of their own unaffiliated house church.

In July 2006 officials demolished a large house church that was under construction in Xiaoshan County, Zhejiang Province. Police reportedly beat hundreds of house church members who arrived to protest the demolition. Officials reportedly had denied repeated requests for permission to build the church. The Government claimed to have offered the church alternative sites on which to build the church. However, the religious group said that the suggested properties were not suitable for building a church.

In June 2006 Henan Province house Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang was sentenced to 7 years and 6 months in prison on charges of obtaining a passport through fraud and illegal border crossing.

In June 2006 police in Langzhong City, Szechuan Province, detained eight house church Christians who were members of a CHCA church. Four leaders of the church, Li Ming, Jin Jinrong, Wang Yuan, and Li Mingbo, were arrested when they went to visit the members of their congregation at the public security office. Three other members of the church were also detained by public security officials when they inquired about members of the church. House church members claimed they were beaten by police. One of the men in the church was reportedly beaten unconscious and then detained for 7 days for "assaulting a policeman." Another church member, Li Ming, was reportedly beaten and kicked by police and suffered head injuries and internal injuries. The four leaders of the group were sentenced to 2 years of reeducation through labor.

In May 2006 police in Langzhong, Szechuan also arrested 30 leaders of another house church and detained 14 of them for an unknown period of time.

In May 2006 several house church activists were detained in Henan Province's Fugou County.

In April 2006 the Government reportedly sentenced Li Huimin to reeducation in Henan Province for holding house church meetings at his home.

In March 2006 police reportedly broke the ribs of disabled pastor Li Gongshe during a raid on his church in Wen County, Henan Province.

In February 2006 security officials detained documentary filmmaker and U.S. legal permanent resident Wu Hao after Wu filmed house church services in Beijing and arranged an interview with Christian human rights attorney Gao Zhisheng, who was placed under house arrest in August 2006. Wu was released in July 2006.

In February 2006 Lou Yuanqi was reportedly detained for holding unauthorized church services in Xinjiang.

In December 2006 Gao Zhisheng was convicted of "inciting subversion." Gao received a 3-year sentence, suspended for 5 years, and 1 year deprivation of political rights. After suspending his sentence, the Government placed Gao under house arrest in Beijing. His wife and two children continued to be harassed and detained by authorities. In December 2005 Gao sent an open letter to President Hu Jintao highlighting abuses of Falun Gong practitioners. The letter described torture of Falun Gong practitioners and the extra-legal activities of the "610 office."

In 2006 house church pastors Liu Yuhua and Wang Zaiqing were sentenced to imprisonment for publishing Christian literature. They were charged with "involvement in illegal business practices."

On Christmas Day 2005 police reportedly raided an unregistered church in Manasu County, Xinjiang, destroying property, and detained several worshippers. More than 200 were reportedly detained, including Pastor Guo Xianyao.

In November 2005 the Government sentenced Beijing-based house church Pastor Cai Zhuohua to 3 years in jail for operating an illegal business based on his work publishing Christian literature. Two of Cai's relatives received shorter terms of imprisonment on the same charges.

In September 2005 Government agents reportedly broke bones of Christian businessman Tong Qimiao at a police station in Kashgar, Xinjiang, while he was being interrogated about the activities of local house churches.

In August 2005 police reportedly raided a training class in Jiangxi Province for Sunday school teachers.

In July 2005 the Government reportedly detained 100 Sunday school students in Hebei Province.

In July 2005 six members of the group Way of the Goddess of Mercy (Guanyin Famen), which the Government considers a "cult," were sentenced to 2 to 4 years in prison for producing material for circulation involving a cult organization.

In April 2007, family planning officials in Baise, Guanguxi Province, forced Wei Linrong, the wife of house church pastor Liang Yage to have an abortion against her will. Ten officials took Ms. Wei, who was 7 months' pregnant, from her home to a hospital where doctors induced delivery. According to media reports, Liang and his wife explicitly objected to the forced abortion because it forced them to violate their religious beliefs.

In some locations local authorities reportedly forced unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce ordinations approved by the Holy See, join the official church, or face a variety of punishments including fines, job loss, detentions, and having their children barred from school. Some Catholic officials were forced into hiding. Ongoing harassment of unregistered bishops and priests was reported in recent years, including Government surveillance and repeated short detentions.

Numerous detentions of unofficial Catholic clergy were reported, in particular in Hebei Province, traditionally home to many unregistered Catholics.

There was no new information about unregistered Bishop Su Zhimin, who has been unaccounted for since his reported detention in 1997. The Government had not responded to requests to clarify his status by the end of the reporting period.

There was no information about the whereabouts of Bishop Zhao Zhendong, the bishop of Xuanhua, Hebei, who was arrested in December 2004.

There was no information about the whereabouts of Bishop Shi Enxiang, who was arrested in April 2001.

In June 2007 police arrested 73-year-old Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hubei, for the tenth time since 2004. Security officials held him at an unknown location until his release on June 22, 2007.

In March 2007 police in Shaanxi province detained Bishop Wu Qinjing, the bishop of Zhouzhi. His whereabouts were unknown. According to a Government document released on March 9, 2007, Bishop "Wu Qinjing should not run any church affairs as a bishop and should not interfere with the Zhouzhi diocese management." The document told Catholics to "draw a line of demarcation" around the bishop and stated that the Government had been reeducating Bishop Wu since May 2006.

In December 2006 security officials arrested nine unregistered priests near Baoding, Hebei.

In September 2006 authorities detained Bishop Wu Qinjing, who was ordained in October 2005 with the approval of the Holy See but without Government permission, for 5 days. He was forced to sign a document stating that his ordination was illegal.

In September 2006 unregistered priests Shao Zhoumin and Jiang Sunian were detained in Shenzhen upon their return from Europe. Shao and Jiang reportedly falsified documents to facilitate travel to Rome and were sentenced to 9- and 11-month prison sentences. In prison Father Shao reportedly lost his hearing. Both priests were denied visitors in prison.

In August 2006 Hebei authorities released Bishop An Shuxin, Bishop Su's auxiliary bishop, but reportedly arrested Father Li Huisheng and approximately 90 Catholic worshippers.

In Hebei, the region with the highest number of Catholics, the Government reportedly pressured an unofficial church to join the CPA. In August 2006 police in Xiwanzi arrested and tortured Father Li Huisheng and then released him. Ninety members of Father Li's church protested his arrest outside police headquarters. Police beat the protestors and forced them to disperse. Later that evening, approximately 500 police launched a raid to rearrest Father Li and the church members. The whereabouts of 20 persons were unknown. Father Li was sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment for "inciting the masses against the Government." Another priest from Xiwanzi, Father Wang Zhong, disappeared. In July 2006 Xiwanzi authorities also arrested and detained 82-year-old Bishop Yao Liang. Xiwanzi authorities also

forbade Catholics from making an annual traditional pilgrimage to Mount Muozi in Inner Mongolia.

In April 2007, Ablikim Kadeer, a son of Uighur Muslim activist, Rebiya Kadeer, was sentenced to 9 years in prison and 3 years deprivation of political rights, reportedly after confessing to charges of "instigating and engaging in secessionist activities." In November 2006 Alim Kadeer, another son of Rebiya Kadeer, was sentenced to 7 years in prison and fined $62,500. Qahar Abdurehim, a third son of Rebiya Kadeer, was fined $12,500 for tax evasion but not jailed. Authorities reportedly beat and tortured Alim and Ablikim. In June 2006 Xinjiang officials charged Alim, Ablikim, and Qahar with state security and economic crimes just days after Rebiya Kadeer was elected president of the Uighur American Association, an NGO that advocates for the human rights, including religious freedom, of the Uighur people.

In August 2006 the Government sentenced Huseyin Celil to life imprisonment for "separatist activities." Celil was a popular Uighur Muslim imam in Kashgar before emigrating to Canada in 2001. Celil reportedly spoke about religious freedom and nonviolent struggle against human rights violations during his sermons and used a megaphone to amplify his call to prayers from the mosque, which attracted Government scrutiny. Celil left China in 1995 and continued to preach at a local mosque in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Celil then emigrated to Canada in 2001. In May 2006 Celil was arrested by Uzbek authorities while visiting Tashkent and deported to China. Chinese authorities claimed that he was involved in the assassination of a Uighur leader in Kyrgyzstan, despite Celil's denials that he was Guler Dilaver, a suspect in the assassination. Celil's family claims he was being punished for his political and religious activism. NGOs claimed that the Government also committed numerous other violations of Celil's right to due process.

The Government tightly monitored the publication of Islamic religious materials. In July 2005 several Uighur Muslims were reportedly detained for possession of an illegal religious book called the Mishkat-ul Misabih and other illegal religious activities in Xinjiang.

Uighur Muslim Aminan Momixi was detained in August 2005 after teaching the Qur'an to more than 30 students in her home. Provincial officials stated that she was released after a period of education and training, but did not respond to requests to clarify her whereabouts.

Between July and September 2006, an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 Uighur Muslims traveled to Islamabad, Pakistan, seeking Hajj visas from the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Islamabad. However, applicants were denied visas, reportedly due to an agreement between the Saudi Government and the Chinese Government restricting individuals from applying for Hajj visas in a third country. After applicants held extended protests at the Saudi Embassy, the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan reportedly told them to return to Xinjiang to wait and join Government-sponsored Hajj tours the following year. The Ambassador reportedly also threatened applicants with loss of employment and pension, fines, or retribution against their family members if they did not comply. Most of the group returned to Xinjiang, although approximately 1,000 applicants reportedly received visas in Pakistan. Some expressed concern that the price of the Government-sponsored Hajj tours was inflated and preferred to travel on their own in an attempt to reduce costs. Others stated that they did not want to go on Government-sponsored Hajj tours because of a requirement that they profess loyalty to the CCP.

There were credible reports of torture and deaths in custody of Falun Gong practitioners in past years, and overseas Falun Gong groups claimed that such incidents continued. 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 reported that its members have been subject to excessive force, abuse, rape, detention, and torture, and that some of its members, including children, have died in custody.

Some foreign observers estimated that at least half of the 250,000 officially recorded inmates in the country's reeducation-through-labor camps are Falun Gong adherents. Falun Gong sources overseas placed the number even higher. Hundreds of Falun Gong adherents were also incarcerated in legal education centers, a form of administrative detention, upon completion of their reeducation-through-labor sentences. Government officials denied the existence of such "legal education" centers. According to the Falun Gong, hundreds of its practitioners have been confined to psychiatric institutions and forced to take medications or undergo electric shock treatment against their will. In March 2006 U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture Manfred Nowak reported that Falun Gong practitioners accounted for 66 percent of victims of alleged torture while in Government custody.

In May 2007 the Russian Government repatriated Falun Gong practitioner Dr. Gao Chunman back to China. Gao was a professor at Qinghua University and had refugee status from the United Nations. According to Gao's wife (a Russian citizen), Gao was kidnapped, and she feared that he would be severely punished by the Chinese Government. The Russian Government also deported Falun Gong practitioner Ma Hui to China in the spring of 2007.

In May 2006 Yuan Yuju and Liang Jinhui, relatives of a Hong Kong journalist who works for a television station supportive of the Falun Gong, were sentenced to reeducation-through-labor "for using an illegal cult to organize and obstruct justice," relating to their distribution of Falun Gong materials.

In April 2006 and thereafter, overseas Falun Gong groups claimed that a hospital in Sujiatun, Shenyang, was the site of a "concentration camp" and of mass organ harvesting, including from live prisoners. In response to the allegations, the Government opened the facility in question to diplomatic observers and foreign journalists. Observers found nothing inconsistent with the operation of a normal hospital.

Zheng Ruihuan and Liu Yinglan were reportedly detained in Shandong Province in July 2005 for practicing Falun Gong.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to emphasize the role of religion in promoting a "Harmonious Society," allowed the PRAs to expand their cooperation with religious groups in other countries, and funded the building of new places for worship by registered religious groups. For example, in spring 2007 the Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) began offering on-line, graduate-level theological training courses to Chinese clergy and students via the TSPM's Yanjing Union Theological Seminary outside of Beijing. DTS, with input from RAB officials and the CCC, developed coursework that may lead to a Certificate in Graduate Studies for Chinese students. Several faculty members at Yanjing completed courses offered through the DTS program.

Chinese citizens who worshipped outside the PRAs continued to assert their right to religious freedom under the law. Lawsuits in multiple provinces were reportedly effective in deterring harassment by local authorities. In May 2007 police in Shandong Province settled a lawsuit brought against them by a house church plaintiff, Tian Yinghua. Tian held a regular church service in her living room. Police raided the service, detained the 31 members of the house church, and ordered Tian to serve 10 days in jail. As part of the settlement, the police issued a formal apology, promised not to bother the church again, and paid Tian damages of 13 cents. Police reportedly honored the terms of the settlement, including the promise not to harass the church.

The Shanghai Government allowed an American company to open a TSPM church for its employees on company premises. Both Chinese and foreign employees of the company attended the services.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

In some parts of the country, there was a tense relationship between registered and unregistered Christian churches and, according to press reports, between some members of unregistered church groups. There were reports of divisions within both the official Protestant church and the house church movement over issues of doctrine; in both the registered and unregistered Protestant churches, there are conservative and more liberal groups. In other areas the two groups coexisted without problems. In some provinces, including Hebei, unregistered and official Catholic communities sometimes had a tense relationship.

In the past Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists 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 object to some folk religion practices. Religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetans and Uighurs, experienced 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 was also occasional tension between the Han and Hui Muslims.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

President Bush raised religious freedom issues during meetings with President Hu Jintao in St. Petersburg in July 2006, and Hanoi in November 2006. Senior U.S. officials called on the Government to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and to respect religious freedom. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte raised concerns about religious freedom during multiple meetings with senior Chinese officials. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes spoke at a state-sanctioned Chinese church service during her January 2007 visit to Beijing.

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the consulates general in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made concerted efforts to encourage greater religious freedom in the country. U.S. officials condemned abuses while supporting positive trends within the country. In exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, U.S. officials 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. On numerous occasions the Department of State, the Embassy, and the consulates 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 relevant Chinese Government officials.

At the same time, U.S. officials argued to the country's leaders that freedom of religion would strengthen, not harm, the country. U.S. officials encouraged the Government to engage the growth of faith-based aid by both registered and unregistered religious groups. In April 2007, the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom hosted Madame Cao Shengjie, head of the China Christian Council, on a visit to the White House Office of Faith-Based Initiatives. U.S. officials also encouraged the Government to allow greater freedom to its religious citizens to engage in peaceful activities as a means of countering the appeal of religious extremists.

The Embassy and consulates also collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within 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 religious leaders and scholars to the United States on international visitor programs to see firsthand the role that religion plays in U.S. society.

During the period covered by this report, U.S. Ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr., highlighted problems of religious freedom and cases of individual religious prisoners of conscience in his public speeches and in his private diplomacy with senior officials. Officials from the Embassy and the four consulates met with Government officials responsible for religion and with clergy or practitioners in official and unofficial religious groups. Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom John V. Hanford III met with several religious freedom activists in Washington, D.C.

Since 1999 the Secretary of State has designated the country as a CPC under the IRFA for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Economic measures in effect against the country under the IRFA relate to restriction of exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment (Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, P.L. 101–246).

HONG KONG

The Basic Law, or Constitution, provides for freedom of religion, and its Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination. The Government generally respected these provisions in practice.

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

There were a few reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Six of the largest religious groups have long collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up a joint conference of religious leaders.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) has an area of 422 square miles on more than 200 islands and the mainland and a population of 6.9 million. Approximately 43 percent of the population practice some form of religion. The two most prevalent religions are Buddhism and Taoism, which are often celebrated together in the same temple. The region is home to approximately 700,000 Buddhists or Taoists, 320,000 Protestant Christians, 240,000 Roman Catholics, and 90,000 Muslims. There are small numbers of Hindus, Sikhs, approximately 4,000 practicing Jews, and an estimated 4,600 Jehovah's Witnesses. Many persons also hold Confucian beliefs, although few practice it as a formal religion. Representatives of the spiritual movement Falun Gong stated that their practitioners numbers approximately 500; however, Government officials claimed the number is lower.

Protestants have 1,400 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, Pentecostals, and the Salvation Army. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is also present.

There are approximately 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, an estimated 800 Christian churches and chapels, 5 mosques, 4 synagogues, 1 Hindu temple, and 1 Sikh temple. Catholics are served by 1 cardinal (appointed in 2006), 1 bishop, 297 priests, 66 monks, and 516 nuns, all of whom maintain traditional links to the Vatican. The assistant secretary general of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference had his office in the region. Along with its apostolic work, the Catholic Church engages in a broad array of social service activities. It operates 313 schools and kindergartens that enrolled more than 264,000 children. In addition it operates 6 hospitals, 15 clinics, 37 social centers, 18 hostels, 13 homes for the aged, and 19 rehabilitation centers.

Protestant churches are also deeply involved in education, health care, and social welfare. Protestant organizations operate three post-secondary institutions: Chung Chi College at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, and Lingnan University. As of November 2006, they also ran 160 secondary schools, 206 primary schools, 273 kindergartens, and 116 nurseries. In addition they operated more than 30 theological seminaries and Bible schools, 30 Christian publishing houses, 70 Christian bookshops, 7 hospitals, 18 clinics, 35 homes for the elderly, 47 centers for the disabled, and scores of youth and day care centers. Two ecumenical bodies in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union and the Hong Kong Christian Council, facilitate cooperative work among Protestant and other churches across the HKSAR. These bodies also have a number of affiliated organizations, such as the Hong Kong Christian Service, Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, United Christian Medical Service, Christian Family Service Centre, and Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital.

Various Muslim organizations also offer medical care, education, and financial aid to the needy. Some religious leaders and communities maintained active contacts with their mainland and international counterparts. Catholic and Protestant clergy were invited to give seminars and teach classes on the mainland and to develop two-way student exchanges on an ongoing basis.

The number of Falun Gong practitioners was reported to have dropped from approximately 1,000 to an estimated 500 since the crackdown on the mainland began in mid-1999, although Government officials claimed that the number was lower for both periods.

Numerous foreign missionary groups operate in and out of the region.

A wide range of faiths was represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service. A large number of influential non-Christians were educated in Christian schools.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law provides for freedom of religion, and the Bill of Rights Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination by the HKSAR Government. The Government

does not tolerate the abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors. Hong Kong has been a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since July 1, 1997, but according to the Basic Law the HKSAR enjoys a high degree of autonomy in the area of religious freedom under the "one country, two systems" concept. The Government does not recognize a state religion.

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 recognize the pope as the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Home Affairs Bureau functions as a liaison between religious groups and the Government. 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. In February 2006 a Muslim group comprised primarily of residents of South Asian ethnicity complained that the Government had unfairly levied a $1.3 million (HK$10 million) land use fee on the construction of a new mosque. They argued that a similar-sized project by an ethnic Chinese charity was charged a fee of only $130 (HK$1,000). The Government denied that it had discriminated against the Muslim group on the basis of religion and contended that the two projects fell into different zoning categories.

Although not alleging religious discrimination, a Jewish group complained that the Government was insensitive to its attempts to find a location in the expensive central district to build a new synagogue.

The Election Committee Ordinance stipulates that the 6 largest religious groups in Hong Kong hold 40 seats on the 800-member Election Committee, which chooses the chief executive. The bodies that represent the largest religious groups are the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, Hong Kong Christian Council, Hong Kong Taoist Association, The Confucian Academy, and The Hong Kong Buddhist Association. These 40 representatives are chosen by the leaders of the various religious groups.

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 law requires each school that receives Government funding to establish a management board. Forty percent of the management board's members can be elected by teacher and parent groups. The sponsoring body can appoint the remaining 60 percent. In 2003 the Government passed the Education (Amendment) Ordinance which will affect 300 Catholic schools that enroll approximately 25 percent of the student population. Prior to the Education Ordinance, the management of each school was responsible for selecting all of its members. The ordinance, however, stipulates that 40 percent of each school's management must be elected representatives of teachers, parents, alumni, or other members of the community. The ordinance, which becomes effective in 2010, mandates that every school (not just those which receive Government funding) have its own incorporated management committee comprised of elected parents, teachers, and alumni. The diocese unsuccessfully sued to have the ordinance overturned in the Court of First Instance and may appeal the decision.

The Falun Gong is registered under the Societies Ordinance. Falun Gong is generally free to practice, organize, conduct nonviolent public demonstrations, and attract public attention through parades, pamphleteering, and manning booths to publicize its movement. During the period covered by this report, Falun Gong regularly conducted public protests against the repression of fellow practitioners in the PRC. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Xiang Gong and Yan Xin Qigong, were registered and practiced freely.

In February 2006 police authorized two marches by the Muslim community to protest the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in Europe. The cartoons sparked violence worldwide, but both marches were peaceful.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not have jurisdiction over religious practices in the HKSAR.

The Basic Law calls for ties between the region's religious organizations and their mainland counterparts to be based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect."

In March 2006 the Vatican appointed then Bishop Joseph Zen, the head of the Catholic Diocese, to the post of cardinal. The PRC Government responded by warning Cardinal Zen to refrain from commenting on the region's political matters. Despite this, Cardinal Zen remained an outspoken critic of both mainland and HKSAR policies and a strong advocate of religious freedom.

In March 2007 the Court of First Instance dismissed an application for judicial review brought by four Taiwanese Falun Gong practitioners and the Falun Dafa Association of Hong Kong and affirmed the city's power to regulate who enters the city. The practitioners and more than 80 other followers of Falun Gong were turned away when they arrived for a conference in February 2003. They alleged that they were stopped because of their beliefs and that the city was acting on behalf of mainland authorities, who have designated the group an illegal "evil cult." The Government argued that the four were denied entry for organizing disruptive activities that would threaten public order. As of June 2007, the Hong Kong Association of Falun Gong planned to request discovery in the case over why the members were denied entry. The court found that the practitioners were not aliens under the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance, which defines Taiwan as part of China. "Aliens, and those in the same position as aliens, can be refused permission without reasons given or a hearing," the ruling justice said. In April 2007 one of the plaintiffs charged that "China's dirty hand has interfered in Hong Kong, which used to have values of freedom," according to *The Epoch Times*. Several hundred Falun Gong practitioners were reportedly permitted to enter that weekend.

According to Falun Gong's local spokesperson, more than 140 practitioners seeking to enter from Taiwan, including one of the four denied entry in February 2003, were turned away from the HKSAR in the days leading up to the 10th anniversary of its retrocession to the mainland. The spokesperson reportedly alleged that airport police subjected some practitioners to brutal treatment when they refused to board planes back to Taiwan. At least two Falun Gong members from Taiwan, including a professor from Taiwan Normal University and an official from the Mainland Affairs Council, were denied entry into Hong Kong during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the region.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were a few reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

In February 2006 four men used sledgehammers to break into the Hong Kong office of the Falun Gong-owned newspaper *The Epoch Times* and destroyed an expensive piece of machinery in the paper's print shop. Police investigated the incident but, as of the end of this reporting period, had made no arrests. Falun Gong claimed the attack was part of a worldwide campaign against the group by the Chinese Communist Party. The Hong Kong Journalists Association, the International Federation of Journalists, and several legislators condemned the break-in.

Falun Gong had opened the print shop only 2 weeks prior to the break-in after experiencing difficulties in finding a local company willing to print its paper. Following the February 2006 break-in, which disabled the print shop, Falun Gong was able to hire a printing company to continue publication of its paper, although orders again had to be placed on a day-to-day basis.

While Falun Gong practitioners freely and openly practiced their beliefs, they were occasionally subjected to more subtle forms of discrimination from private businesses. There were reports of discrimination in the business community against Falun Gong in 2004 and 2005, including refusal to book conference venues.

According to several reports and verbatim statements published by *The Epoch Times* in February 2007, Dr. Wang Lian, a Falun Gong practitioner who is a resident of Macau but worked in *The Epoch Times*' Hong Kong office, was detained and interrogated by Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials on the mainland in mid-September 2006. At the time of his detention, Dr. Lian was also an assistant professor of information technology at the Macau University of Science and Technology and a technical network advisor in the Hong Kong office of *The Epoch Times*. Dr. Lian claimed the PSB officials directed him to spy on his colleagues and facilitate the disruption of operations—including hacking into the computer networks—at *The Epoch Times*' office. He reportedly turned over some files and documents to the PSB, which

he claimed were of limited use, and fled to seek asylum in Australia in early February 2007.

Two ecumenical bodies facilitate cooperative work among Protestant churches and encourage local Christians to play an active part in society. The largest religious groups have long 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 Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Consulate General officers have made clear U.S. Government interest in the full protection and maintenance of freedom of religion. Consulate General officers at all levels, including the Consul General, meet regularly with religious leaders and community representatives.

MACAU

The Basic Law, which is the Constitution of the Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR), and the Religious Freedom Ordinance provide for freedom of religion and prohibit discrimination on the basis of religious practice, and the Macau SAR Government generally respected these rights in practice.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious belief or practice and only a few reports of religious discrimination.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The region has a total area of 13 square miles, and according to Macau Government Information Bureau statistics in 2006, a population of 500,000. Buddhism is the largest religion, with 79.3% of Macau's population professing the religion; over 5% are Roman Catholic and more than 1% Protestants, along with a mix of Muslims, Baha'i and other professed faith groups. There are an estimated 200 Falun Gong practitioners active in the region. There are approximately 400 Muslims. The region SAR has an estimated 50 Buddhist and Taoist temples, 60 Christian churches (of which 18 are Catholic), and 1 mosque.

Missionaries are active and represent a wide range of faiths. The Catholic Diocese has been providing social welfare services to the community for 5 decades. The diocese receives considerable funds from the Government, and Catholic philanthropists in the region, Hong Kong, and around the world subsidize the establishment of Catholic schools, child care centers, clinics, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation homes, and vocational training centers. Statistics published by the Government of Macau show that in 2004–2005 the Diocese managed and maintained 31 educational institutions with 36,000 students. The Catholic Church also operates 24 social service agencies, including 8 child-care centers, 6 convalescent homes for the elderly and sick, 5 rehabilitation homes for the mentally handicapped and disabled, and 5 hostels for single-parent family and problem students. More than 2,000 people, including nonresidents, benefited from the wide range of services.

Many Protestant denominations are represented in the region, including Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Pentecostal churches. Other evangelical denominations are represented and independent local churches also operate. Other evangelical denominations are also represented in Macau. Independent local churches also operate in Macau. Reformed Theological Seminary is also present.

As of December 2006, an estimated 70 Protestant churches with 6,000 members conduct services in Chinese, which are attended by approximately 4,000 worshippers every Sunday. Approximately 300 Protestants attend services conducted in foreign languages. Protestant organizations operate 4 secondary schools with affiliated primary schools and kindergartens. In addition, there are four primary schools with affiliated kindergartens, a special needs school, and an adult education center. These have a total of about 10,000 students. There are also Bible study institutes, some training centers and two Christian bookshops.

As of December 2006, there were approximately 2,500 Baha'is. The Baha'is in 1988 established a 250-student institution that encompasses a kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law or Constitution, provides for freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach, and freedom to conduct and participate in religious activities. The Religious Freedom 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 respected these rights in practice.

Article 34 of the Basic Law states: "Macau residents shall have freedom of religious belief, and freedom to preach and to conduct and participate in religious activities in public." Furthermore, Article 128 stipulates that: "The Government, 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 their believers to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the SAR."

The region protects the freedom of religion, worship, and belief in general through the Freedom of Religion and Worship Law (Law No. 5/98/M). This law stipulates that: "Freedom of religion and worship are recognized and protected."

The Religious Freedom Ordinance requires religious organizations to register with the Identification Services Office.

Missionaries were free to conduct missionary activities. Religious entities can apply to use electronic media to preach, and such applications are generally approved.

The Religious Freedom Ordinance stipulates that religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church recognizes the pope as the head of the church. In 2003 the Holy See appointed the current coadjutor bishop for the region's diocese. In December 2006 the Macau Inter-University Institute, which is affiliated with the Catholic University in Portugal, was reportedly planning to offer a Christian studies course beginning in September 2007. The course would serve Catholic seminary students from the mainland. More than 20 openings would be available in the first year.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not govern religious practices in the region.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government and are exempt specifically from the Societies Ordinance, which requires the registration of all other nongovernmental organizations. The Falun Gong, which considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is not registered under the Societies Ordinance. Falun Gong is also not registered with the Identification Services Bureau, which is responsible for receiving and processing registrations required under the law. The Bureau has not issued instructions regarding the Falun Gong. Senior Government officials have stated that, despite this lack of registration under the Religious Freedom Ordinance, Falun Gong practitioners may continue their legal activities.

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 followers. However, Falun Gong representatives claimed that they were denied entry into the region, especially during sensitive political periods. Falun Gong members also expressed concern and filed complaints with the police about being denied the right to display photographs for public viewing. As of the end of the reporting period, the matter had not been resolved.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the region.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses and only a few reports of discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Relations among the various religious communities were good. Citizens generally were tolerant of other's religious views and practices. Public ceremonies and dedications often included 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 met regularly with leaders of all religious groups and spiritual organizations in the region.

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, although it limits protection of the exercise of religious belief to activities which the Government defines as "normal." The Government's 2005 White Paper on "Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China" states, "Organs of self-government in autonomous areas, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and relevant laws, respect and guarantee the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities, and safeguard all legal and normal religious activities of people of ethnic minorities." However, the Government maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship. Although the authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed activities they viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, such as religious activities venerating the Dalai Lama (which the Government described as "splittist").

Overall, during the period of the report the level of repression remained high, and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor; however, the atmosphere for religious freedom varied from region to region. Conditions were generally more relaxed in Tibetan autonomous areas outside the region, with the exception of parts of Sichuan's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. A sixth round of discussions between envoys of the Dalai Lama and Chinese Government officials began June 29. The Dalai Lama's envoys made previous visits to China for discussions in 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2006 and in 2005 met with Government officials in Switzerland. Although the Government has refused to engage in direct discussions with the Dalai Lama, it continued to assert that the door to dialogue and negotiation was open, provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirmed that Tibet and Taiwan were inseparable parts of China.

Although in the past there were reports of the deaths of monks and nuns due to maltreatment in prison, there were no known reports of deaths due to maltreatment in prison during the period covered by this report. Buddhist nun Kelsang Namtso was shot and killed at the Nangpa La pass on September 30, 2006, by Chinese border guards as she and a group of 70 Tibetans attempted to cross into Nepal. Buddhist leaders such as Gendun Choekyi Nyima and Tenzin Delek remained in detention or prison, and central figures in Tibetan Buddhism such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama remained in exile. Dozens of monks and nuns continued to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic" or political education. The Government refused free access to Tibetan areas for international observers, tightly controlled observers who were granted access, and tightly controlled publication of information about conditions in the region. These restrictions made it impossible to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Diplomats and nongovernmental organizations NGOs advocated for international access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, whom the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists continued to recognize as the Panchen Lama, and urged the Chinese Government to pursue dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Tibetan areas of China have an area of 871,649 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas was 5.4 million; the Tibetan population within the TAR was 2.4 million, while in autonomous prefectures and counties outside the TAR the Tibetan population was 2.9 million. Most practiced Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority also practiced traditional Bon religion. This held true for many Tibetan Government officials and Communist Party members. Other residents of Tibetan areas who were religious believers included Han Chinese, who practiced Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and traditional folk religions; Hui Muslims; Tibetan Muslims; and Christians. There are four mosques in the TAR with approximately 4,000 to 5,000 Muslim adherents, as well as a Catholic church with 560 parishioners, which is located in the traditionally Catholic community of Yanjing in the eastern TAR. There were a small number of Falun Gong adherents in the TAR.

The number of monks and nuns in the TAR fluctuated significantly in the late 1990s due to continuing enforcement of the "patriotic education campaign" and 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." Since 1996, the Government has reported that there are 46,000 monks and nuns and 1,700 religious sites in the TAR, but this figure has likely varied over time due to continued politically motivated detentions as well as monastic secularization and commercialization caused by tourism. The Government figure of 46,000 monks and nuns represented only the TAR, where the number of monks and nuns was very strictly controlled. According to statistics collected by the China Center for Tibetan Studies, a Government research institution, there were 1,535 monasteries in Tibetan areas outside the TAR. Informed observers estimated that a total of 60,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns lived in Tibetan areas outside the TAR.

There are some unregistered Protestant churches or "house churches" in the TAR. Missionaries were present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government sought to restrict religious practice to Government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of the activity of religious groups. The Government remained wary of Tibetan Buddhism in general and its links to the Dalai Lama, and it maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed any activities which they viewed as vehicles for political dissent. This included religious activities that officials perceived as supporting the Dalai Lama or Tibetan independence.

According to Chinese news reports, Zhang Qingli, the Secretary of the Communist Party in the TAR, announced his intention to intensify strict political control over Buddhist practice at a meeting of Communist party officials in mid 2006. According to the reports, Zhang referred to a life or death struggle against the Dalai Lama and his "clique," and referred to them as the "biggest obstacle hindering Tibetan Buddhism from establishing normal order."

TAR officials in September 2006 released the "Implementation Regulations on the Religious Affairs Regulations." The 56-article regulation took effect on January 1, 2007. The new regulations cover management of religious groups, religious venues, and religious personnel. According to Chinese media reports, the regulation will play an important role in resisting the "Dalai Clique's separatist activities." The 2007 Regulations supersede the 1991 regulations on religion in the TAR. The 2007 Regulations increase the Government's control over the movement of nuns and monks by requiring that they seek permission from county level officials to travel to another county. The previous regulations only required monks and nuns to seek travel permission if they were visiting another province.

According to the educational practices of Tibetan Buddhism, monks and nuns must travel to receive specialized training from teachers who are considered experts in their particular theological traditions. The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) has reported that monks and nuns who reach India claim that their main reason for choosing to leave Tibet, even temporarily, is to continue their studies, which they are unable to do inside Tibet, and to obtain a blessing from the Dalai Lama. According to Article 13 of the new regulations, religious organizations must petition

the Government's religious affairs department in order to build religious structures. If individuals build a religious structure without authorization, the religious affairs department may demolish the structure.

In April 2007 the official Web site of the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture reported that during Kardze's Tenth Five-Year Plan the prefecture government will make proposal and approval procedures for new building, relocation, or expansion of religious venues more strict. According to the Web site, monastic construction carried out without official approval will be stopped. The prefecture government will further strengthen management of monks and nuns exiting and entering the prefecture. In addition, the Government will further strengthen "antiseparatist work in religious circles."

The Government had the right to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders. In practice many monks study and worship within their monasteries without being "registered" or obtaining an official monastic identification card issued by religious affairs authorities. Authorities curtailed the traditional practice of sending young boys to monasteries for religious training by means of regulations that forbade monasteries from accepting individuals under the age of 18. Nevertheless, some monasteries continued to admit younger boys, often delaying their formal registration until the age of 18. In two different monasteries outside the TAR, the number of unregistered young monks rose into the thousands.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government officials closely associated Buddhist monasteries with proindependence activism in Tibetan areas of China. Spiritual leaders encountered difficulty reestablishing historical monasteries due to lack of funds, general limitations on monastic education, and denials of Government permission to build and operate religious institutions, which officials in some areas contended were a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. While some monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution have been rebuilt or repaired, many have not and others remained only partially repaired. The Government stated that funding restoration efforts was done to support the practice of religion, but it also was done in part to promote the development of tourism in Tibetan areas. Most recent restoration efforts were funded privately, although a few religious sites also were receiving Government support for reconstruction projects at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government stated that there were no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries and that each monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC) decided independently how many monks the monastery could support. Many of these committees were Government-controlled, and in practice the Government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, particularly in the TAR.

The Government continued to oversee the daily operations of major monasteries. The Government, which did not contribute to the monasteries' operating funds, retained management control of monasteries through the DMCs and local religious affairs bureaus. Regulations restricted leadership of many DMCs to "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns and specified that the Government must approve all members of the committees. At some monasteries, Government officials were members of the committees.

The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in the TAR and other Tibetan areas remained inadequate; many teachers were in exile, older teachers were not being replaced, and those remaining in Tibetan areas outside the TAR had difficulty securing permission to teach in the TAR. In recent years, DMCs at several large monasteries began to use funds generated by the sales of entrance tickets or donated by pilgrims for purposes other than the support of monks engaged in full-time religious study. As a result, some "scholar monks" who had formerly been fully supported had to engage in income-generating activities. Some experts were concerned that, as a result, fewer monks would be qualified to serve as teachers in the future. While local government officials' attempts to attract tourists to religious sites provided some monasteries with extra income, they also deflected time and energy from religious instruction. In July 2004 authorities permitted resumption of the Geshe Lharampa examinations, the highest religious examination in the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddism, at Lhasa's Jokhang Temple for the first time in 16 years. The exam has new political content that is unrelated to the test's historical religious content. According to officials in the TAR, seven monks in the TAR passed the Geshe Lharampa exam in 2006. The Great Prayer Festival, or Monlam Chenmo, traditionally closely associated with the Geshe exam process, has been banned each year since 1988. Foreign academics reported that some monasteries still forbid monks from taking the Geshe Lharampa exams. Practically, it is also difficult for monks

to receive the level of instruction necessary to even take the Geshe Lharampa exam. Monks who wished to sit the exam traditionally traveled to the TAR to study at monasteries such as Sera and Drepung monasteries. However, movement of monks from one monastery to another for study is now extremely difficult, especially for monks from outside the TAR who wish to study at monasteries inside the TAR.

Official Chinese-language press reports emphasized the importance and strengthening of monastic patriotic education. Reports also stated political education was necessary for the whole society to be vigilant towards combating "splittism" and the influence of the "Dalai Clique." The primary responsibility for conducting monastic political education remained with monastery leaders, and the form, content, and frequency of training at each monastery appeared to vary widely; however, conducting such training remained a requirement and is a routine part of monastic management. In some monasteries outside the TAR, political education sessions were held infrequently.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 2,405 Tibetans arrived at the Tibet Reception Center (TRC) in Nepal in 2006, compared with 3,395 in 2005. During the year departures were higher than arrivals, with 2,946 Tibetans departing the TRC for India. This was due to a backlog of Tibetans being able to depart for India at the end of 2005.

Many Tibetans, particularly those from rural areas both inside and outside the TAR, continued to report difficulties obtaining passports. The application process was not transparent, and residents of different Tibetan areas reported obstacles ranging from bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption to denials based on the applicant's political activities or religious beliefs. Due in part to the difficulties faced by many Tibetans in obtaining passports, and in part to the difficulty many Chinese citizens of Tibetan ethnicity encountered obtaining entry visas for India, it was difficult for Tibetans to travel to India for religious purposes. Nevertheless, thousands of Tibetans, including monks and nuns, visited India via third countries. The number of Tibetans who returned to China after temporary stays in India is unknown.

The Government placed restrictions on the movement of Tibetans during sensitive anniversaries and events and increased controls over border areas at these times. In December 2006 the TAR Government announced a stepped-up "anti-illegal border crossing campaign" targeting Tibetans seeking to go to India through Nepal. There were reports that Tibetans trying to cross the border illegally were detained for several months, although in most cases no formal charges were brought. There were also reports of the torture of persons, particularly monks, returning from Nepal and India and reports that Government officials asked family members for bribes in exchange for the release of returnees. In September 2006 a 17-year-old nun was fatally shot by Chinese border guards while she was attempting to cross into Nepal with an estimated 70 other Tibetans at the Nangpa La Pass. Approximately half of the group, which included a number of children, was taken into custody, while at least 43 made it to Nepal. The Government reported the release of those taken into custody a few months later. Returned exiles reported that authorities pressured them not to discuss issues that the Government characterized as politically sensitive, such as the Dalai Lama.

The Karmapa, leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kagyu sect and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, remained in exile following his 1999 flight to India. The Karmapa stated that he fled because of the Government's controls on his movements and its refusal either to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or to allow his teachers to come to him. Visitors to Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa, noted that the population of monks remained small and the atmosphere was subdued.

The Government routinely asserted control over the process of identifying and educating reincarnated lamas. For example, the Government authorities closely supervised the current Reting Rinpoche, who is 8 years old, and his education differed significantly from that of his predecessors.

The Government also strictly restricted contacts between reincarnate lamas and the outside world. For example, young incarnate lama Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa in 1994, lived under Government supervision at Nenang Monastery. Foreign delegations have been refused permission to visit him.

Government officials maintained that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama was not illegal and that most TAR residents chose not to display his picture. Nevertheless, authorities appeared to view possession of such photos as evidence of separatist sentiment when detaining individuals on political charges. Article 34 of the 2007 "TAR Measures for Implementation of the 'Regulations for Religious Affairs'" states that "religious personnel and religious citizens may not distribute books, pictures, or other materials which harm the unity of the nationalities or endanger state security." Photos or books of the Dalai Lama fall into this cat-

egory. Pictures of the Dalai Lama were not openly displayed in major monasteries and could not be purchased openly in the TAR. In Tibetan areas outside the TAR, visitors to several monasteries saw pictures of the Dalai Lama openly displayed. Amnesty International reports that a former monk, Sonam Gyalpo, was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in mid-2006 for "endangering state security" after videos of the Dalai Lama were found in his house.

The Government continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the man recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama. Photos of the "official" Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu, were not publicly displayed in most places, most likely because most Tibetans refuse to recognize him as the Panchen Lama.

Many Tibetan Buddhist religious figures held positions in local People's Congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which do not require Communist Party membership. Some religious figures accepted political positions in order to protect their monasteries, and some Tibetan officials openly practiced Buddhism. The Government continued to insist, however, that Communist Party members and senior employees adhere to the Party's code of atheism, and routine political training for cadres continued to denigrate religious belief and promote atheism. Government officials confirmed that some Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officers were members of the Communist Party and that religious belief was incompatible with Party membership.

Security was intensified during the Dalai Lama's birthday, sensitive anniversaries, and festival days in the TAR and in some other Tibetan areas. The prohibition on celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6 continued. In December 2006 the Government banned participation of Government cadres, workers and students in the Ganden Ngamcho festival. In March 2007 authorities in Lhasa heightened security in major monasteries in order to control gatherings celebrating the long life of the Dalai Lama. The Government reportedly altered traditional dates of Tibetan festivals such as the Drepunb Shodon Festival. Some Government employees were told that they would lose their jobs or have their wages reduced if they disobeyed this order. According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Lhasa City school children were prohibited from participating in religious activities during the holy month of Saka Dawa, which takes place in the fourth month of the Lunar calendar.

Travel restrictions for foreign visitors to and within the TAR were reported during the period covered by this report and the Government tightly controlled visits by foreign officials to religious sites in the TAR.

Some foreign religious workers were expelled from the TAR during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government strictly controlled access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and it was difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. There were reports that the atmosphere for lay religious practice in Tibetan areas was more restrictive than in the recent past. The Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the man recognized as the 11th Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama in 1995 (when he was 6 years old). Government officials claimed he was 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 him to confirm his well-being have been refused. Nyima turned 18 on April 25, 2007. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltsen Norbu, 17, the boy it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama's eleventh reincarnation.

The Government did not provide any information on Lama Chadrel Rinpoche, who was reportedly still under house arrest near Lhasa for leaking information about the selection of the Panchen Lama.

Officials did not provide any new information on Champa Chung, former assistant of Chadrel Rinpoche who was reportedly still held in custody since the expiration of his prison term in 1999.

Limited access to information about prisoners and prisons made it difficult to ascertain the number of Tibetan prisoners of conscience or to assess the extent and severity of abuses. According to the Congressional Executive Commission on China Political Prisoner Database (CECC PPD), as of April 2007 there were 99 Tibetan prisoners of conscience, 76 of whom were monks and nuns. The CECC reported that the number of prisoners of conscience declined to less than one-fifth the number 10 years ago.

Approximately 46 prisoners of conscience remained in prison in Lhasa, most serving sentences on the charge of "counterrevolution," which was dropped from the criminal law in 1997. Authorities have stated that acts previously prosecuted as counterrevolutionary crimes continue to be considered crimes under state security laws.

In January 2007 Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported the arrest of Penpa, a village leader from Dhingri County near Shigatse in the TAR. Chinese police were reported to have searched Penpa's home and found materials relating to the 2005 Kalachakara teachings of the Dalai Lama. In March 2007, the Tibet Information Network (TIN) reported that Penpa was sentenced in February to serve 3 years in Nyari Prison in Shigatse. The charges against Penpa were unknown.

In May 2007 the head of the large Dungkyab Monastery in Qinghai was forced to step down after he refused to sign a document condemning the Dalai Lama. According to a Radio Free Asia report, Khenpo Tsanor would not sign a Government document which stated that the Dalai Lama should be criticized and his "splittist" behavior condemned, even though Tsanor knew he might be killed or imprisoned.

Destruction of monastic residences and expulsion of monks and nuns continued at Yachen Monastery in Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province.

In May 2007, the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) reported that a number of restrictions were imposed on religious observance of Saka Dawa, the birth of the Buddha, celebrated on April 15. TCHRD reported that the Lhasa City Committee ordered children not visit monasteries, circumambulate, or wear amulet thread during Saka Dawa. The Committee threatened the children with expulsion from school.

The Lhasa Governor's office and the Lhasa City Party Secretary prohibited Party members, civil servants and staff from participating in or even observing the activities of the Ganden Ngamcho anniversary. Party members were threatened with demotions and salary cuts if they did not comply with the order. Small farmers were also reportedly banned from selling incense and juniper leaves for religious purposes on religious days.

During Saka Dawa in April 2007, the Chinese People's Armed Police (PAP) destroyed a statue of Guru Padmasambava (known as Guru Rinpoche) at Samye Monastery. The rubble from the statue was reportedly being transferred to an unknown location. After the destruction of the statue, the PAP reportedly surrounded the monastery. The statue was built with private donations of 800,000 yuan from Chinese Buddhists. An official at the monastery referred to the new religious affairs regulations which state that a new religious structure cannot be built without official consent.

Chinese border guards shot and killed Buddhist nun Kelsang Namtso at the Nangpa La Pass between Tibet and Nepal on September 30, 2006. She was with a group of 70 Tibetans who were attempting to cross into Nepal. The Government said that the Tibetans were illegal border crossers. Forty-three Tibetans from the group are known to have arrived safely in exile, however, at least 25 others, including a number of young children, were taken into custody by the PAP. A professional Romanian cameraman and climber who happened to be in the area at the time was able to film the incident which clearly showed the Tibetans where not armed and were fired on from the back.

In June 2006 authorities in Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture initiated a political reeducation campaign for children at the Kardze Tibetan Middle School following a call by the Dalai Lama for Tibetans to stop wearing animal skins in their traditional clothing. Soldiers in uniform entered the school and said that Tibetans were not permitted to wear animal skins. They reportedly asked students whether they supported the Dalai Lama. Those who said they did not were encouraged to trample a picture of the Dalai Lama. A 16-year-old girl named Yiwang was detained and was still being held without charge as of April 2007.

In June 2006 RFA reported that authorities detained five Tibetans, including two Buddhist nuns from Kardze Prefecture, for allegedly handing out leaflets promoting Tibetan independence. In Lhasa, Yiga, a nun, and two other women, Sonam Choetso and Jampa Yangtso, were reportedly detained on the first day of the Saka Dawa religious period on May 28, 2006. Kayi Doega and Sonam Lhamo, a nun, were reportedly detained in Kardze Prefecture on June 1 and June 2, 2006 respectively, on suspicion of organizing the leafleting.

On August 15, 2006, police in Kardze County detained Lobsang Paldan, a 22-year-old monk from Kardze Monastery. He was sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment. The charges were unknown. Seven other monks from Kardze Monastery whose names were unknown were also arrested in August 2006 and were still in prison at the end of the reporting period.

According to a report by Radio Free Asia (RFA), on August 23, 2006, security officials arrested Jinpa, a reincarnate lama and the abbot of Choktsang Taklung Monastery in Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Jinpa was reportedly arrested on suspicion of involvement in displaying proindependence posters at the monastery.

In late 2006 the Government released Nun Yonten Drolma, also known as Yonten Tsomo, from prison. She was detained with two other Tibetan nuns and two monks for distributing letters calling for Tibetan independence.

At the end of 2006, the Government also released monks Tashi Gyaltsen, Tsultrim Phelgyal, Tsesum Samten, and Lobsang Thargyal from Treldzong. They were from Dakar Treldzong Monastery in Qinghai Province and were arrested in 2005 for publishing politically sensitive poems. Jhamphel Gyatso, a monk who was arrested with them, is still detained and is serving a 4- to 5-year sentence. The charges are unknown.

Prison authorities continued to subject imprisoned monks and nuns to torture. After her release to the United States in March 2006 on medical parole, Tibetan Buddhist nun Phuntsog Nyidrol reported that she was tortured by Government authorities. Phuntsog Nyidrol also stated that religious prisoners are not allowed to meet with other religious prisoners, use their religious names in prison, or recite prayers in prison. Phuntsog Nyidrol also stated that prison administrators deny family visits to religious prisoners as punishment.

There was no new information on Gendun, a Tibetan monk and teacher of traditional monastic dance from Yulung Monastery in Qinghai. In April 2006 TIN reported that Gendun had been sentenced in January 2006 to 4 years in prison after he gave talks about Tibetan culture and history. The charges against him were unknown.

Lhasa orphanage owners Bangri Chogtrul Rinpoche (Jigme Tenzin Nyima) and Nyima Choedron were convicted in 2002 of "espionage and endangering state security." In March 2006 Bangri Chogrul's life sentence was commuted to a fixed term of 19 years, due to be completed in 2021. Nyima Choedron was released early on February 26, 2006.

In early October 2005 Ngawang Jangchub, a 28-year-old Tibetan monk, was found dead in his room at the Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. According to reports, Ngawang Jangchub's death followed a heated dispute with the monastery's "work team" over his refusal to denounce the Dalai Lama. Government officials claimed Ngawang Jangchub's death was due to natural causes.

According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), authorities arrested five monks who refused to take part in patriotic education that began in October 2005 at the Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. The monks, who were identified as Ngawang Namdrol, Ngawang Nyingpo, Ngawang Thupten, Ngawang Phelgey, and Phuntsok Thupwang, reportedly refused to denounce the Dalai Lama and recognize Tibet as part of China. TAR officials said that the monks were not detained but rather expelled from the monastery. The officials acknowledged that hundreds of monks gathered to petition for their return.

A number of former political prisoners and other suspected activists were reportedly detained in the period prior to the 40th anniversary of the founding of the TAR on September 1, 2005. According to Human Rights Watch, Sonam, a monk from the Potala Palace, was detained by security forces in August 2005. In September 2005, another monk, Sonam Gyalpo, was arrested on charges of separating the country and destroying national unity.

In mid-2005 Tibetan Buddhist monks Dzokar and Topden and layman Lobsang Tsering from Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture were released after serving a portion of a 3-year jail term for putting up proindependence posters.

In March 2005 the World Tibet Network News (WTN) reported that local authorities extended Tibetan Buddhist monk Jigme Gyatso's prison sentence for alleged "political activities" from 15 to 17 years.

In January 2005 the Government commuted the death sentence of Tenzin Delek to life in prison. In 2002 Tenzin Delek, a prominent lama from Kardze, was arrested for his alleged connection with a series of bombings in Sichuan Province. On January 26, 2003, Tenzin Delek and his associate, Lobsang Dondrub, were sentenced to death for their alleged role in the bombings. The Government executed Lobsang Dondrub the same day despite reportedly giving assurances to senior diplomatic officials that both accused would be afforded due process and that their sentences would be reviewed by the national-level Supreme People's Court. Tenzin Delek was being held in Tuandong Prison in Sichuan Province.

The status of Phutnsok Tsering in Magar Dhargyeling Monastery in the TAR, who was arrested in 2005, for possessing a portrait of the Dalai Lama and writings on Tibetan nationalism, remained unknown.

There was no new information on the whereabouts of the two Tibetan nuns and two Tibetan monks who were detained along with Yonten Drolma (who was released in late 2006). According to the London-based Free Tibet Campaign, authorities in Gansu Province arrested the group in May 2005 for distributing letters at a local monastery, market, and other areas calling for Tibetan independence. The Congressional Executive Commission on China Political Prisoner Database (CECC PPD) also listed monk Sherab as being detained as part of this group.

The whereabouts of monk Jigme Dasang from Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai who was detained in June 2005 were still unknown.

The Government did not provide any new information on the report that police in Qinghai's Golog Prefecture shot and killed Tibetan Buddhist religious leader Shetsul in October 2004 after he and other monks demanded police pay for medical treatment for injuries suffered while in custody.

The status of the following persons remained unconfirmed at the end of the reporting period: two monks from Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture who were arrested in 2004 for displaying the Tibetan national flag and Choeden Rinzen, who was arrested in 2004 for possessing a Tibetan national flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism. While there was some friction between Tibetan Buddhists and the growing Muslim Hui population in cities of the Tibetan areas, it was attributable more to economic competition and cultural differences than to religious tensions.

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 focused external pressure regarding abuses. In regular exchanges, including with religious affairs officials, U.S. diplomatic personnel consistently urged both the Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom in Tibetan areas.

Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination. In 2006, officials asked for and were denied a meeting in Lhasa with Chadrel Rinpoche, reportedly under house arrest since 2002.

U.S. diplomatic personnel stationed in the country maintained contacts with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in the Tibetan areas, and they traveled regularly to the TAR and other Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom. The ability of U.S. diplomatic personnel to travel freely and talk to people at ease while in the area was extremely limited. Not all requests to travel to Tibetan areas were granted.

U.S. development and exchange programs aim to strengthen Tibetan communities in China and preserve their environmental and cultural heritage. Both are inextricably linked to Tibet's Buddhist religious tradition. In Tibetan Buddhism, there is a tradition of designating mountains, forests, and other physical spaces as being endowed with some spiritual significance. Monasteries have traditionally played a major role in managing the local habitat around them as a result. The Dalai Lama has also strongly encouraged Tibetans to be good stewards of the environment. The U.S. diplomatic mission in China has also promoted religious dialogue through its exchange visitor program, which financed the travel of several prominent scholars of traditional Tibetan culture and religion to the United States.

EAST TIMOR

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

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

There were minimal reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 5,406 square miles and shares the island of Timor with Indonesia's Nusa Tenggara Timur Province. The estimated population of the territory was 1,063,000 as of July 2006. The overwhelming majority of the population is Catholic, and the Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution. There are also small Protestant and Muslim communities.

According to a 2005 World Bank report, 98 percent of the population is Catholic, 1 percent Protestant, and less than 1 percent Muslim. Most citizens also retain some vestiges of animistic beliefs and practices, which they have come to regard as more cultural than religious.

The number of Protestants and Muslims declined significantly after September 1999 because these groups were disproportionately represented among supporters of integration with Indonesia and among the Indonesian civil servants assigned to work in the province from other parts of Indonesia, many of whom left the country in 1999. The Indonesian military forces formerly stationed in the country included a significant number of Protestants, who played a major role in establishing Protestant churches in the territory. Fewer than half of those congregations existed after September 1999, and many Protestants were among those who remained in West Timor. The Assemblies of God is the largest and most active of the Protestant denominations.

The country had a significant Muslim population during the Indonesian occupation, composed mostly of ethnic Malay immigrants from Indonesian islands. There were also a few ethnic Timorese converts to Islam, as well as a small number descended from Arab Muslims living in the country while it was under Portuguese authority. The latter group was well integrated into society, but ethnic Malay Muslims at times were not. Only a small number of ethnic Malay Muslims remained.

Domestic and foreign missionary groups operated freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the Constitution became effective in 2002, the Government has continued to enforce some Indonesian laws and United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) regulations not yet superseded by the Constitution or national legislation. The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship for all persons and stipulates that no one shall be persecuted or discriminated against on the basis of religious convictions. The Government generally protected this right. Police cadets receive training in equal enforcement of the law and nondiscrimination.

In 2003 a law on immigration and asylum went into effect that includes two articles concerning religion. The first article requires religious associations to register with the Minister of Interior if most or all members are foreigners. Registration entails submitting documents setting forth objectives, statutes, or bylaws, and a membership list. At least one established foreign Protestant group reported that it had trouble registering due to bureaucratic obstruction. The second provision states 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.

There is no official state religion, although Catholicism remains dominant. Most designated public holidays are Catholic holy days, including Good Friday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

In 2005 the Government established a consultative body on religious education in public schools. The consultative body consisting of members of the Government and religious organizations met in 2006 but produced no concrete results.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The strong and pervasive influence of the Catholic Church may sometimes affect the decisions of Government officials. Given the dominant role in society of the Catholic Church, its leaders often play important roles in public debate and discussion. After assuming the office of Prime Minister in July 2006, José Ramos-Horta repeatedly emphasized the importance of Government consultation with the Catholic Church on all major decisions; however, members of Protestant churches and the

Islamic community also have some political influence and have held high positions in the executive branch of Government, the military, and the National Parliament.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversions

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were minimal reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution, and its priests and bishops are accorded the highest respect in local society. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities generally are friendly in the capital of Dili, despite the past association of these groups with the occupying Indonesian forces. Outside of the capital, non-Catholic religious groups sometimes have been viewed with suspicion.

Some Muslim groups have at times been victims of harassment.

Non-Catholic Christian groups operating in the countryside also reported that their ministries sometimes encountered hostility. These tensions at times escalated into incidents of harassment and low-level violence, primarily in more remote communities in the districts. According to Protestant leaders, individuals converting from Catholicism to Protestantism were subject to harassment by family members and neighbors, and in some cases clergy and missionaries were threatened or assaulted. In several instances village leaders 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 opposition from neighbors and local officials. Most Protestant leaders reported that Catholic Church officials and Government authorities were helpful in resolving disputes and conflicts when they occurred.

SECTION IV. U.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 regularly expresses support to Government leaders for consolidation of constitutional democracy, including respect for basic human rights such as religious freedom.

In addition the U.S. Government maintained a dialogue with Members of Parliament during their deliberations on legislation affecting religious freedom. The U.S. Government supported the justice sector to encourage the development of judicial institutions that would promote the rule of law and ensure respect for religious freedom as guaranteed in the Constitution.

FIJI

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

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

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 of more than 300 islands with a total area of 7,050 miles and a population of 918,700. Most of the population is concentrated on the main island of Viti Levu. Estimates of religious affiliation were as follows: 52 percent of the population is Christian, 30 percent Hindu, and 7 percent Muslim. The largest Christian denomination is the Methodist Church, which claims approximately 218,000 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 commu-

nity, particularly in rural areas. There also is a small number of active nondenominational Christian groups.

Religious affiliation runs largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous Fijians, who constitute 54 percent of the population, are Christian. Most Indo-Fijians, who account for an estimated 38 percent of the population, practice Hinduism, while 20 percent follow Islam. In addition, an estimated 6 percent of Indo-Fijians are Christian. Other ethnic communities include Chinese, Rotumans, Europeans, and other Pacific Islanders. Approximately 60 percent of the small Chinese community practices Christianity and 4 percent adheres to Confucianism. The very small European community is predominantly Christian.

Hindu and Muslim communities maintain a number of active religious and cultural organizations.

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Citizens have the right, either individually or collectively, both in public and private, to manifest their religion or beliefs in worship, observance, practice, or teaching. There is no state religion. Religious groups are not required to register. The Government did not restrict foreign clergy, domestic or foreign missionary activity, or other activities of religious organizations.

The Government recognizes major holy days of the predominant religions as national holidays, including Christmas, Easter, Diwali, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Government partially sponsored 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 continued to be a political issue. Younger Methodist leaders have in recent years moderated the expression of strong nationalist sympathies endorsed by the previous church 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. From March 2006 to March 2007 incidents of sacrilege decreased somewhat from the previous year. Of the 40 incidents reported, 70 percent consisted of unidentified persons robbing and desecrating Hindu temples. There were 12 acts of desecration of churches and none of mosques. Police surmised that this vandalism had more to do with theft than with religious intolerance. In 2006, several Hindu members of Parliament called on law enforcement authorities to take more stringent action to prevent attacks on Hindu temples and punish perpetrators.

There were isolated problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream seeking to establish congregations in some villages and outer islands. In a few cases, local traditional leaders prevented groups from proselytizing or holding meetings.

SECTION IV. U.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 disseminated materials related to political and religious freedom across a wide spectrum of society.

INDONESIA

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 by the Government during the reporting period, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, while most of the population enjoyed a high degree of religious freedom, the Government recognized only six major religions. Some legal restrictions continued on certain types of religious activity and on unrecognized religions. The Government sometimes tolerated discrimination against and the abuse of religious groups by private actors and often failed to punish perpetrators. While Aceh remained the only province authorized to implement Islamic law (Shari'a), several local governments outside of Aceh promulgated laws implementing elements of Shari'a that abrogated the rights of women and religious minorities. The Government did not use its constitutional authority over religious matters to review or overturn these local laws. Persons of minority religious groups and atheists continued to experience official discrimination, often in the context of civil registration of marriages and births or the issuance of identity cards.

The public generally respected religious freedom; however, extremist groups used violence and intimidation to force eight small, unlicensed churches and one Ahmadiyya mosque to close. In addition several churches and Ahmadiyya places of worship that were forcibly shut in previous years by mobs remained closed. Some Government officials and mass Muslim organizations continued to reject the Ahmadiyya interpretation of Islam resulting in discrimination against its followers. Many perpetrators of past abuse against religious minorities were not brought to justice. Also, instances of extremists attacking and attempting to terrorize members of other religions occurred in certain provinces during the reporting period.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy promoted religious freedom and tolerance through exchanges and civil society development.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

An archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, the country has an area of 700,000 million square miles and a population of 245 million.

According to the 2000 census report, 88.2 percent of the population described themselves as Muslim, 5.9 percent Protestant, 3.1 percent Roman Catholic, 1.8 percent Hindu, 0.8 percent Buddhist, and 0.2 percent "other," including traditional indigenous religions, other Christian groups, and Jewish. Some Christians, Hindus, and members of other minority religious groups argued that the census undercounted non-Muslims. The Government does not recognize atheism.

Most Muslims in the country are Sunni. The Shi'a estimate that there are between one and three million Shi'a. The majority of the mainstream Muslim community follows two orientations: modernists, who closely adhere to scriptural orthodox theology while embracing modern learning and concepts; and traditionalists, who often follow charismatic religious scholars and organize around Islamic boarding schools. The leading modernist social organization, Muhammadiyah, claimed 30 million followers, while the largest traditionalist social organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, claimed 40 million.

Smaller Islamic organizations range from the Liberal Islam Network, which promotes an individual interpretation of doctrine, to groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, which advocates a pan-Islamic caliphate, and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, which advocates implementation of Shari'a as a precursor to an Islamic state. A small minority of people subscribe to the Ahmadiyya interpretation of Islam and there are 242 Ahmadiyya branches. Other messianic Islamic groups exist, including Darul Arqam, Jamaah Salamulla (Salamulla Congregation), and the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Institute.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs estimates that 19 million Protestants (referred to as Christians in the country) and 8 million Catholics live in the country. The province of East Nusa Tenggara has the highest proportion of Catholics at 55 percent. Meanwhile, the province of Papua contains the highest proportion of Protestants at 58 percent.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs estimates that 10 million Hindus also live in the country. Hindus account for almost 90 percent of the population in Bali. Hindu minorities (called "Keharingan") reside in Central and East Kalimantan, the city of Medan (North Sumatra), South and Central Sulawesi, and Lombok (West Nusa Tenggara). Hindu groups such as Hare Krishna and followers of the Indian spiritual leader Sai Baba also present, although in smaller numbers. Some indigenous reli-

gious groups, including the "Naurus" on Seram Island in Maluku Province, incorporate Hindu and animist beliefs into their practices. Many have also adopted some Protestant principles. The Tamil community in Medan represents another important concentration of Hindus.

The country has a small Sikh population, between 10,000 and 15,000. Sikhs reside primarily in Medan and Jakarta. Eight Sikh temples (gurdwaras) are located in North Sumatra while Jakarta has two Sikh temples with active congregations.

Among Buddhists, approximately 60 percent follow the Mahayana school, Theravada followers account for 30 percent, and the remaining 10 percent belong to the Tantrayana, Tridharma, Kasogatan, Nichiren, and Maitreya schools. According to the Young Generation of Indonesian Buddhists, most adherents live in Java, Bali, Lampung, West Kalimantan, and the Riau islands, ethnic Chinese make up an estimated 60 percent of Buddhists.

The number of Confucians remains unclear because at the time of the 2000 national census respondents were not allowed to identify themselves as such. Their number may have increased after the Government lifted restrictions in 2000, such as the right to celebrate publicly the Chinese New Year. The Supreme Council for Confucian Religion in Indonesia (MATAKIN) estimated that ethnic Chinese made up 95 percent of Confucians with the balance mostly indigenous Javanese. Many Confucians also practiced Buddhism and Christianity. MATAKIN urged the Government to include Confucianism as a category in the next census.

An estimated 20 million people in Java, Kalimantan, and Papua practice animism and other types of traditional belief systems termed "Aliran Kepercayaan." Some animists combine their beliefs with one of the Government-recognized religions.

There are small Jewish communities in Jakarta and Surabaya. The Baha'i community reported thousands of members, but there were no reliable figures available.

Falun Dafa representatives claim the group, which considers itself a spiritual organization instead of a religion, has between 2,000 and 3,000 followers, nearly half of whom live in Yogyakarta, Bali, and Medan.

No data exists on the religious affiliations of foreign nationals and immigrants.

Approximately 191 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 for the freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Constitution accords "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 first tenet of the country's national ideology, Pancasila, declares belief in one God. However, some restrictions exist on certain types of religious activity and on unrecognized religions. Government employees must swear allegiance to the nation and to the Pancasila ideology. The Government sometimes tolerated extremist groups that used violence and intimidation against religious groups, and often failed to punish perpetrators. The Government did not use its authority to review or revoke local laws that violated freedom of religion.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs extends official status to six faiths: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and, as of January 2006, Confucianism. Atheism is not recognized. Religious organizations other than the six recognized religions can register with the Ministry for Culture and Tourism only as social organizations, restricting certain religious activities. Unregistered religious groups do not have the right to establish a house of worship and have administrative difficulties obtaining identity cards and registering marriages and births.

The Government requires officially recognized religious groups to comply with Ministry of Religious Affairs and other ministerial directives, such as the Revised Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship (2006), Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia (1978), and the Guidelines for the Propagation of Religion (1978).

On December 9, 2006, the House of Representatives passed a new civil registration bill requiring citizens to identify themselves on Government ID cards as belonging to one of the six religions recognized by the Government. The bill legalized what in the past had been a nationwide administrative practice. The bill does not allow for the registration of other religions on ID cards.

The 2006 Revised Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship, issued on March 21, 2006, requires religious groups that want to build a house of worship to obtain the signatures of at least 90 members and 60 persons of other

religious groups in the community stating that they support the establishment, as well as approval from the local religious affairs office. Some religious groups complained that the revised decree made it too difficult to establish a house of worship, while others argued that the increased clarity of the revised decree would improve the situation by diminishing conflicting interpretations of the 1969 decree that it superseded.

The Guidelines for Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions requires domestic religious organizations to obtain approval from the Ministry of Religion to receive funding from overseas donors. The Guidelines for Propagation of Religion ban proselytizing under most circumstances.

The Child Protection Act of 2002 makes attempting to convert minors to a religion other than their own through "tricks" and/or "lies" a crime punishable by up to 5 years in prison.

Article 156 of the criminal code makes spreading hatred, heresy, and blasphemy punishable by up to 5 years in prison. Although the law applies to all officially recognized religions, it is usually applicable in cases involving blasphemy and heresy against Islam.

The question of implementing Shari'a generated controversy and concern during the reporting period. Aceh remained the only province in which the central Government specifically authorized Shari'a. Presidential Decree 11/2003 formally established Shari'a courts in Aceh. However, several local governments across the country promulgated Shari'a-inspired ordinances.

According to the Indonesian Women's Coalition, at least 46 Shari'a-based local laws have been issued by local governments throughout the country. These include laws requiring women to wear headscarves in public; mandating elected officials, students, civil servants, and individuals seeking marriage licenses to be able to read the Qur'an in Arabic; and prohibiting the drinking of alcohol and gambling. During the reporting period, the Government did not exercise its jurisdiction over religious matters in order to review or invalidate these controversial local laws that appear to contravene the Constitution.

For example, according to a senior provincial official, 18 out of 22 South Sulawesi regencies adopted aspects of Shari'a law. These range from the implementation of Islamic dress codes for women in public to prohibitions on alcohol and gambling. Bulukumba Regency in South Sulawesi has four local laws implementing elements of Shari'a for all Muslims. Bulukumba and Bone Regencies have implemented specific requirements that local village heads, candidates for political office, secondary school students, and people seeking marriage licenses be able to read the Qur'an in Arabic. In Padang, West Sumatra, the mayor instructed all Muslim women to wear a headscarf and local authorities enforced this requirement. The regulations did not apply to non-Muslims. Several regencies have passed regulations preventing women from receiving Government services if they are not wearing headscarves. Several other places have local laws similar to those in Bulukumba Regency.

Regulations in the Madura Regency of Pamekasan call for Muslim attire to be worn by Muslim civil servants and the cessation of both public and work activities during the call to prayer.

Tangerang in Banten Province continues to ban public displays of affection, alcohol, and prostitution. These bans apply to both Muslims and non-Muslims. The controversial antiprostitution clause vaguely defines a prostitute as anyone drawing suspicion based on his or her attitude, behavior, or dress and places the burden on suspected women to prove their innocence. Advocacy groups challenged the constitutionality of Tangerang's regulation, but in March 2007 the Supreme Court upheld the prohibition.

In October 2005 the regional representative office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in West Nusa Tenggara issued a ban on 13 religious groups, including Ahmadiyya, Jehovah's Witness, Hare Krishna, and 9 forms of traditional beliefs (Aliran Kepercayaan) as being deviations of Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. The ban is still valid.

During the reporting period, a special committee of Parliament continued to review a revised version of a highly controversial draft pornography bill. This bill was originally introduced in 2004 as the Antipornography and Pornographic Action bill and outlawed displaying "sensual body parts," kissing in public, and any writings, art, recordings, or broadcasts with sexually explicit content, all of which were broadly defined. The draft bill sparked a heated national debate and led to large demonstrations both for and against. Opponents of the bill had characterized it as an attempt by proponents of Shari'a law to implement Shari'a indirectly. In February 2006 Indonesian lawmakers reportedly revised the draft to take into account cultural traditions and local sensitivities and changed the bill's name to the Pornography Bill.

The 1974 Marriage Law makes polygamy illegal for civil servants, except in limited circumstances. Marriage law for Muslims draws from Shari'a and allows a man to have up to four wives, provided that he is able to provide equally for each. For a man to take a second, third, or fourth wife, he must obtain court permission and the consent of the first wife; however, conditions are not always met in practice. Many women reportedly found it difficult to refuse, and Islamic women's groups remain divided over whether the system needed revision.

Divorce remained a legal option available to members of all religions, but Muslims seeking divorce generally had to turn to the Islam-based family court system, while non-Muslims obtained a divorce through the national court system. In divorce cases, women often bear a heavier evidentiary burden than men, especially in the Islam-based system. The law requires the former husband to provide alimony or its equivalent, but no enforcement mechanism exists, and divorced women rarely receive such support.

In December 2006 a prominent Muslim preacher, Aa Gymnastiar, announced that he had married a second wife. Gymnastiar's second marriage became a national issue when, in the aftermath of the news, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono summoned the Minister of Women's Empowerment and officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to discuss the controversy over polygamous marriage. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment since announced that the Government was considering extending its ban on polygamy to cover all officials working for the state, including legislators and soldiers. The proposal received enthusiastic backing from progressive Muslims and many women, but met with strong opposition from religious conservatives who argued that polygamy was permitted in Islam and therefore should not be banned by secular law.

The Government permits the practice of the traditional belief system of Aliran Kepercayaan as a cultural manifestation, not a religion. Followers of Aliran Kepercayaan must register with the Ministry of Education's Department of Education. Local authorities generally respect these adherents' right to practice.

On June 28, 2007, the Government issued Regulation No. 37/2007 which refers to the Civil Administration and Marriage Laws. The new regulation allows Aliran Kepercayaan officiants to preside over marriage ceremonies and directs civil registration offices to register marriage licenses signed by such marriage officiants, enabling these marriages to be legally recognized. Implementing regulations or other technical guidance, however, had not been issued by the end of the reporting period.

The national Government did not formally ban the activities of the minority Muslim Ahmadiyya sect, but some local governments did. Despite the central Government's jurisdiction over religious affairs, the administration continued to refrain from taking a clear position on the local bans against the Ahmadiyya.

Some Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist holy days are national holidays. Recognized Muslim holy days include the Ascension of the Prophet, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Muslim New Year, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. National Christian holy days include Christmas, Good Friday, and the Ascension of Christ. Three other national holidays are the Hindu holiday Nyepi, the Buddhist holiday Waisak, and Chinese New Year, celebrated by Confucians and other Chinese. In Bali, all Hindu holy days are regional holidays, and public servants and others do not work on Saraswati Day, Galungan, and Kuningan.

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 entertainment establishments. In 2006 a Jakarta decree once again ordered the month-long closure of nonhotel bars, discos, nightclubs, sauna spas, massage parlors, and venues for live music. Billiard parlors, karaoke bars, hotel bars, and discos were allowed to operate for up to 4 hours per night. Some members of minority faiths, as well as some Muslims, believed these orders infringed on their rights.

Based on Law 17/1999, the Government has a monopoly on the organization of the Hajj to Mecca. The law states that the Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for providing guidance, service, and protection to citizen Hajj pilgrims during their pilgrimage. The Ministry also determines the costs associated with the Hajj and issues the Hajj passport.

In 2003 the Government passed the National Education Law. By the end of the reporting period the President had not signed the law's draft regulation on religious instruction and religious education. This regulation would mandate religious instruction in any one of the six official religions when requested by a student. Previous laws required all students to take religious instruction in one of five religions, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

The Government bans proselytizing, arguing that such activity, especially in areas heavily dominated by members of another religion, could prove disruptive. In 1979

the Ministries of Religion and Home Affairs issued a joint decree prohibiting conversion efforts.

The Government formed the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) in 1975 and continues to fund and appoint its members. The MUI is not formally a Government body. Nevertheless, its edicts or fatwas (religious decrees) are designed to be moral guiding principles for Muslims. Although MUI opinions are not legally binding, society and the Government seriously consider them when making decisions or drafting legislation. In 2005 the national MUI issued 11 fatwas, including 1 that banned the Ahmadiyya. The fatwas were influential in official and social discrimination against the Ahmadiyya and other minority religious groups during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, several Government officials and prominent political leaders interacted in public forums and seminars with religious leaders and interfaith groups such as the Indonesian Anti-Discrimination Movement and National People's Solidarity (Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa).

The law does not discriminate against any religious group in employment, housing, or health care.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, certain policies, laws, and official actions restricted religious freedom, and the Government sometimes tolerated discrimination against and abuse of individuals based on their religious belief by private actors. There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

The Government requires all adult citizens to carry a National Identity Card (KTP) which, among other things, identifies the holder's religion. Members of religions not recognized by the Government are generally unable to obtain KTPs unless they incorrectly identify themselves as belonging to a recognized religion. During the reporting period, human rights groups continued to receive sporadic reports of local Civil Registry officials who rejected applications submitted by members of unrecognized or minority religions. Others accepted applications, but issued KTPs that inaccurately reflected the applicants' religion. Some animists received KTPs that listed their religion as Islam. Many Sikhs registered as Hindu on their KTPs and marriage certificates because the Government did not officially recognize their religion. Some citizens without a KTP had difficulty finding work. Several nongovernmental organizations and religious advocacy groups continued to urge the Government to delete the religion category from KTPs.

The civil registration system restricts the religious freedom of persons who do not belong to the six recognized faiths; animists, Baha'is, and members of other small minority faiths found it difficult to register marriages or births, notwithstanding the June 2007 regulation pertaining to marriage and civil administration. In practice, couples prevented from registering their marriage or the birth of a child in accordance with their faiths converted to one of the recognized faiths or misrepresented themselves as belonging to one of the six. Those who chose not to register their marriages or births risked future difficulties: a child without a birth certificate cannot enroll in school and may not qualify for scholarships. Individuals without birth certificates do not qualify for Government jobs.

Men and women of different religions continued to face obstacles to marrying and officially registering their marriages. Such couples had difficulty finding a religious official willing to perform an interfaith marriage ceremony; a religious ceremony is required before a marriage can be registered. As a result, some persons converted in order to marry. Others traveled overseas, where they wed and then registered the marriage at an Indonesian Embassy. 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.

Religious groups and social organizations must obtain permits to hold religious concerts or other public events. The Government usually granted permits in an unbiased manner unless a concern existed that the activity could anger members of another religious group in the area.

Religious speeches may be given if delivered to members of the same religion and not intended to convert persons of other faiths. Televised religious programming remained unrestricted, and viewers could watch religious programs offered by any of the recognized faiths.

No restrictions exist on the publication of religious materials or the use of religious symbols; however, the Government bans dissemination of these materials to persons of other faiths.

The armed forces provide religious facilities and programs, including services and prayer meetings, at all major housing complexes for servicemembers who practice

one of the officially recognized religions. 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 six religions.

Since the Government promulgated the Revised Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship in March 2006, a revision of the 1969 decree, implementation and defense of rights conferred under the decree have not always been enforced at the local level. During the reporting period, some Christian and Hindu groups pointed to sporadic acts of discrimination in which local authorities refused to authorize the building of churches and temples even though the groups managed to collect the necessary signatures. For example, the Hindu Association reported their continuing inability to build a temple near Jakarta despite obtaining the required signatures.

In Aceh efforts to educate the public about and enforce Shari'a continued. During Ramadan, shopkeepers closed their businesses for midday prayers and restaurants remained closed all day. Aceh Province maintained hundreds of Shari'a police to enforce the law. They worked jointly with the civil police to investigate and prosecute violations. At times the Shari'a police detained persons for "public education" if caught wearing improper Islamic dress or dating without an escort, but police generally did not arrest or charge them with crimes. The city of Banda Aceh no longer operated a "Mosque Brigade" to ensure appropriate Muslim dress. On August 17, 2006, 15 Shari'a and 10 regular police officers raided the U.N. World Food Programme compound in Banda Aceh. The reason for the raid was variously reported as being either drug or alcohol related.

Foreign religious organizations must obtain permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to provide any type of assistance (in-kind, personnel, or financial) to religious groups.

Foreign missionaries must obtain religious worker visas. Some Christian groups state that Christian missionaries find it difficult to obtain or extend visas. Requirements for religious worker visas are more onerous than for other visa categories. They require not only approval from each office of the Department of Religion from the local to national level, but also information on the number of followers of the religion in the community and a statement confirming that the applicant would work no more than 2 years in the country before being replaced by a local citizen. Foreign missionaries who were granted such visas worked relatively unimpeded. Many missionaries with a primary focus on development work successfully registered for social visas with the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period there were reports of abuse of religious freedom across the country.

During the reporting period, as in past periods, the Government continued to explicitly and implicitly restrict the religious freedom of groups associated with forms of Islam viewed as outside the mainstream. Also during the reporting period, the Government arrested and charged individuals with heresy, blasphemy, and insulting Islam.

In May 2007, the Lebak District, West Java, Department of Religion reportedly encouraged the Muslim sect "Islam Sejati" to return to the fold of orthodox Islam. A few days later, on May 15, 2007, the Banten, West Java, chapter of the MUI issued a fatwa declaring the group deviant because members only prayed three times a day and did not face Mecca when they prayed.

During the reporting period, 187 members of the Ahmadiyya continued to live at a refugee camp in Mataram, Lombok. They have been living in the camp since attacks by local Muslims in February and March 2006 destroyed their homes and mosques. Representatives of Ahmadiyya in Lombok raised security concerns on July 24, 2006, with representatives of the Australian Consulate in Bali. They requested asylum from persecution by local Muslims. In May 2007, the West Nusa Tenggara Deputy Governor stated that the Ahmadiyya are permitted by law to seek asylum in another country.

Violence and actions against the Ahmadiyya community increased after the MUI issued a July 2005 fatwa that condemned the Ahmadiyya as a heretical sect. In 2005 a number of policies, laws, and official actions restricted the religious freedom of the Ahmadiyya community in other areas. Despite a heavy police presence during two attacks on an Ahmadiyya congregation in West Java in July 2005, police made no arrests. A local ban was subsequently passed against the Ahmadiyya in West Java, and they were prevented from using their religious complex. As of the end of the reporting period, no action had been taken against the perpetrators of the incidents. The Government continued to tolerate discrimination and abuse toward the

Ahmadiyya by remaining silent on the 2005 MUI fatwa, the Ahmadiyya's legal status, and local bans.

Dozens of people in Pasuruan, East Java, raided two houses belonging to M. Thoyib and Rochamim on April 9, 2007, accusing them of practicing animism. Both men had previously practiced Islam, but had allegedly embraced animism and conducted animistic prayer ceremonies at cemeteries. Neighbors denounced them as heretics. Local police detained and questioned the two men about their religious activities. They were not arrested or charged; however, the two chose to stay in police custody for their own safety for 2 weeks before returning home.

In April 2007, Malang police arrested eight persons accused of disseminating a "prayer training" video produced by the College Student Service Organization in Batu, East Java. The video allegedly depicts 30 Christians being instructed by their leader to put Qur'ans on the floor at a December 2006 gathering. Following the initial arrests, an additional 33 persons were detained under blasphemy charges in connection with the videos. Christian church leaders denied allegations that Christians were involved in the production or distribution of the videos. At the end of the reporting period, the 41 persons detained were still awaiting trial.

On June 28, 2006, the Polewali, South Sulawesi state court sentenced Sumardi Tappaya, a Muslim high school religious teacher, to 6 months in prison for heresy after a relative accused him of whistling during prayers. The local MUI declared the whistling deviant. The teacher served his sentence.

On June 29, 2006, the Central Jakarta District Court sentenced Lia Eden, leader of the Jamaah Alamulla Group, to 2 years in prison for denigrating a religion. The MUI issued an edict in 1997 declaring Jamaah Alamulla deviant.

The press reported that in May 2006 the Banyuwangi, East Java regional legislature voted to oust Banyuwangi's Regent, Ratna Ani Lestari, from office. Those in favor of the ouster accused Ratna, a Muslim by birth, of blaspheming Islam by practicing a different religion from the one stated on her identity card. Ratna's supporters stated that she was the target of a religiously motivated smear campaign because of her marriage to a Hindu. Ratna remained in place because the courts ruled there was no quorum present when the legislature's vote was taken. The regional legislature appealed to the Supreme Court, which had yet to rule as of the end of the reporting period.

On April 12, 2006, police in Banyuwangi, East Java, arrested five Falun Dafa activists, two of them foreigners, for distributing circulars to local residents. Police later claimed they arrested the five because the circulars contained information about the Chinese Communist party and not because the activists were Falun Dafa members; distribution of Communist literature remains illegal. The five Falun Dafa activists were subsequently released and no charges were filed.

During 2006 the Aceh Government caned at least 25 persons for consuming alcohol, 59 people for gambling, and 32 people for being alone with persons of the opposite sex who were not blood relatives.

The Indonesian Christian Communication Forum claimed that eight small, unlicensed churches in West Java were shut down during the reporting period by Muslim extremist groups despite a 2-year grace period contained in the revised regulation for houses of worship to obtain permits per the new requirements. In 2006 militant groups forcibly closed two churches without police intervention. Another 20 churches closed in 2006 under pressure from militant groups after the promulgation of the revised decree remain closed, according to the Forum. While often present, police rarely acted to prevent forced church closings and sometimes assisted militant groups in the closure. In early June 2006 the central Government announced its intentions to crack down on vigilantism by militant religious groups against places of worship as well as other targets. At the end of the reporting period, there were no specific reports of action.

In November 2005 local police arrested a foreigner and a citizen who were associated with a Christian working on a humanitarian dam building project on the island of Madura. Police acted after local religious leaders alleged that the two engaged in proselytizing. The allegations appeared to be sparked by jealousy on the part of leaders that their communities had not received similar projects. Prosecutors charged the citizen, who continued to publicly profess a nontraditional version of Islam, with denigrating a religion, and the court sentenced him to 2½ in prison. The foreigner was convicted of immigration violations, sentenced to 5½ months, and deported.

In October 2005 police in Central Sulawesi raided their neighborhood Madi sect after locals from other villages complained that sect followers were not fasting or performing ritual prayers during Ramadan. Three policemen and two sect members died in the clash. Sect members reportedly held two police officers hostage but later released them. Five Madi members were tried by local courts for causing the deaths

of the police personnel; in January 2006 they were convicted and sentenced to between 9 and 12 years in prison.

In September 2005 an East Java court sentenced each of six drug and cancer treatment counselors at an East Java treatment center to 5 years in prison and an additional 3 years in prison for violating key precepts of Islam by using paranormal healing methods. A local MUI edict characterized their center's methods as heretical. Police arrested the counselors while they tried to defend themselves from hundreds of persons who raided the center's headquarters. The center was shut down and the six counselors began serving their sentences during the reporting period.

In August 2005 East Java's Malang District Court sentenced Muhammad Yusman Roy to 2 years' imprisonment for reciting Muslim prayers in Indonesian, which MUI declared tarnished the purity of Arabic-based Islam. Roy was released from prison on November 9, 2006, after serving 18 months of his sentence.

In June 2005 police criminally charged a lecturer at the Muhammadiyah University in Palu for heresy. They held him for 5 days before placing him under house arrest after 2,000 persons protested against his opinion article, entitled "Islam, A Failed Religion." The article, among other things, highlighted the spread of corruption in the country. The lecturer was released from house arrest and subsequently fired by the University.

In September 2005 a court sentenced three women from the Christian Church of Camp David to 3 years' imprisonment under the Child Protection Law for allegedly attempting to convert Muslim children to Christianity. The women claimed that family members gave permission for their children to attend Christian youth programs. The Supreme Court rejected the women's appeal in 2006. They served 2 years of their sentences and were released on parole on June 11, 2007.

Local Shari'a-influenced anti-prostitution ordinances exist throughout the country. This included Tangerang, West Java, where the city council passed a vaguely worded by-law on November 21, 2005, prohibiting anyone suspected of being a prostitute, based on his or her attitude or behavior, from being in public places. In 2006 Tangerang arrested and tried dozens of women as prostitutes, including a pregnant mother of two who was accused of being a prostitute because she purportedly had make-up in her purse. In April 2006 three of the women tried in Tangerang filed a request for judicial review of the by-law with the Supreme Court, but the court ruled on March 1, 2007 that the law was valid and not in conflict with higher laws.

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 return to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

Sabili, a widely read Islamic magazine, continued to publish articles with anti-Semitic statements and themes. It suggested the existence of conspiratorial "Zionist" activities in the country. A CD produced in September 2005 by the commercial entity Trustco Multimedia contained political material on the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which holds 8 percent of the country's parliamentary seats, as well as an anti-Semitic game entitled "Shoot the Jews." PKS subsequently asked Trustco Multimedia to pull the CD from consumer shelves, and there were no further reports of the CD appearing in retail establishments.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

During the reporting period, the Government successfully tried and convicted 27 suspects of terrorism and arrested at least 47 other suspected terrorists who are expected to face trial in the future. The trials of 17 suspected terrorists were underway during the reporting period, while at least another 27 suspected terrorists are in detention awaiting trial. These numbers include suspects affiliated with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Poso residents, both Christian and Muslim, involved in violence against members of other religious groups.

On March 21, 2007, Hasanuddin, one of the JI leaders behind the November 2005 beheadings of three Christian schoolgirls in Poso, was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment by a Jakarta Court for his role in the beheadings. Central Sulawesi police arrested Hasanuddin in a May 2006 raid. His arrest highlighted the role of local militant groups and the JI terrorist network in the violent attacks that had plagued the province.

In a January 2007 police raid on suspected terrorists, Muslim extremist Dedi Pasaran was shot dead while Abdul Muis was apprehended. The two men assassinated a respected Christian leader and secretary of the Central Sulawesi Protestant Church, Rev Irianto Kongkoli, on October 22, 2006, in Palu, Central Sulawesi.

In September 2006 the Denpasar District Court sentenced Mohammad Cholily and Anief Solchanudin to 18 and 15 years' imprisonment respectively and Dwi Widianto and Abdul Aziz to 8 years' imprisonment for planning and implementing the October 1, 2005 Bali bombing. Three suicide bombers from JI killed 22 persons and injured more than 100 in the tourist areas of Kuta and Jimbaran in Bali during the attack.

The Government successfully prosecuted 6 persons for the September 2004 suicide attack on the Australian Embassy that killed 10 persons and injured more than 100. In September 2005 the South Jakarta District Court sentenced Rois and Ahmad Hasan to death, Saipul Bahri to 10 years' imprisonment, and the 3 other participants to between 3 and 7 years' imprisonment. In December 2005 the Jakarta High Court upheld the death penalty for Rois and Ahmad Hasan. In January 2006 Rois and Hasan filed an appeal with the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld Hasan's sentence in May 2006, but had not decided on Rois's appeal as of the end of the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In a February 2006 public speech, the President reassured citizens of Chinese descent that their rights were legally and constitutionally guaranteed and asked civil registrar offices across the country to register the marriages of Confucians as required by law. The President's speech, delivered on Chinese New Years day, facilitated Confucians' ability to obtain identity cards that reflected their religious affiliation and register Confucian marriages and births. Representatives of the Chinese community affirmed their ability to practice the Confucian religion in a relatively free fashion during the reporting period.

There were notable efforts in several provinces to build interfaith harmony. The Government of North Sumatra continued to sponsor an organization, FORKALA, which united representatives of all recognized religious groups and promoted interfaith dialogue as a way of avoiding religious conflict.

During the reporting period, religiously motivated violence declined significantly in Maluku and North Malukus. Religiously motivated violence was at its height in the late 1990s. and had continued at a lesser, yet disturbing scale in subsequent years. As in past years, however, Central Sulawesi experienced sporadic bombings, shootings, and other violence despite efforts to restore security and promote reconciliation. Government officials worked with Muslim and Christian community leaders to defuse tensions in both areas.

Maluku remained calm and leaders of both the Muslim and Christian communities and the Maluku provincial government demonstrated their strong commitment to ease religious tension and rebuild. Numerous construction projects to replace damaged churches, mosques, and homes began during the reporting period. The Maluku Department of Social Affairs sponsored a program in September 2006 called "Friendship Bridge," attended by 250 people from all over Maluku who had previously been involved in the religious conflict. Muslims and Christians spent a day together in Letuwaru, a Christian village, and then the next day in Amahai, a Muslim village. Maluku local leaders and representatives of the Muslim and Christian communities joined together in November 2006 in Ambon to discuss ways to further improve the reconciliation process.

During the reporting period, local Muslim and Christian leaders quickly denounced continued attempts to destabilize Maluku. The Chairman of the Maluku Ulama Council and Head of the Maluku Synod condemned two incidents that took place in March 2007.: On March 3, a low-grade homemade explosive was detonated at the gate of the Ambon port injuring 16 people, and on March 5, police defused a similar device at the Ambon Plaza shopping mall. Police have interviewed at least five people in connection with the attacks, but the perpetrators and their motive remains unclear. There have been no arrests. Religious leaders demonstrated strong interfaith cooperation and desire to maintain peace in the region through their rapid and unified denunciation of the incidents.

The situation in Poso remained tense, but police continued to crack down on and arrest several suspects accused of terrorism and other violent crimes related to interreligious strife in Central Sulawesi. Local police in Central Sulawesi continued to protect local churches and prayer houses during religious services. These actions instilled guarded optimism in local residents that the cycle of violence has slowed.

During the first half of 2007 national police in Java captured 17 suspected JI terrorists for planning operations and caching weapons and explosives, some of which they sent to support continued violence in areas like Poso. Police discovered operational plans and confiscated hundreds of kilograms of explosives and detonators, dozens of assault rifles, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. The June 2007 ar-

rest of key JI operational leader Abu Dujana further confirmed the group's violent intentions.

In late 2006 and early 2007, police arrested dozens of suspects in Poso for involvement in a series of sectarian attacks since 2001. By February 2007, police stated that they had arrested 18 of 29 "most wanted" men who they suspected of involvement in the Central Sulawesi violence. According to the national police spokesperson, most of the 18 arrested belonged to the local JI-linked Tanah Runtuh Muslim militant group, which has been accused of many of the most gruesome crimes against Christians since 2001.

On October 29, 2006, Vice President Jusuf Kalla held a meeting with 30 Christian and Muslim leaders in Palu, Central Sulawesi. The vice president asked both religious communities to forgive each other and assured residents that security personnel deployed in Poso would be able to resolve the conflict.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

During the reporting period, there were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

According to the Indonesian Christian Communication Forum, militant groups forced the closing of eight small, unlicensed churches during the reporting period. The Islamic Defenders Group (FPI), the Anti-Apostate Movement Alliance (AGAP), and the Anti-Apostate Division (DAP) of the Indonesian Islamic Ulama Forum, backed by some local Muslim communities, orchestrated many of the church closings. AGAP and FPI stated that they targeted churches that operated without the permission of the local government and the surrounding community as required by the 2006 Revised Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship, despite the 2-year grace period to legally register. Many of the targeted churches operated in private homes and storefronts.

On June 4, 2007, a militant group stormed and vandalized a small Protestant church in a housing complex in Soreang, Bandung Regency, West Java, demanding that it be closed. The attackers claimed to be from the AGAP, but both AGAP and DAP denied responsibility. In a related incident 10 days later, more than 100 people demonstrated to demand the closure of churches housed in private homes in Soreang.

On April 4, 2007, dozens of members of the DAP visited the Pasundan Christian Church in Bandung, West Java, to inquire about a recent incident in which the church allegedly broke its agreement not to convert Muslims to Christianity. A member of DAP, stated that the church signed an agreement in 2005 with the antiapostasy group AGAP not to try to convert Muslims. However, the member alleged that the church had violated its agreement by converting some Muslims in the Garut and Pagauban areas of Bandung by giving them money. Church leaders denied the allegation. Police facilitated an inconclusive meeting on April 10, 2007, between AGAP and church leaders to peacefully discuss the issue.

On September 24, 2006, an estimated 50 people from the DAP attacked and tried to destroy Yayasan Penginjilan Roti Kehidupan Church south of Bandung, West Java, ostensibly because the noise level of prayer meetings disturbed the local community. The attackers started to demolish the roof, stopping only when police intervened. The church is no longer functioning.

In September 2006, close to Ramadan, vigilante Muslim groups carried out "sweeps" of small bars and brothels across the country. On September 8, 2006, hundreds of young men raided roadside stalls in Bogor, West Java, looking for alcoholic drinks to destroy. On September 8, 2006, in Semarang, Central Java, police raided a number of roadside stalls selling alcohol drinks. On September 13, 2006, Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso implored mass organizations to not take the law into their own hands, stating that the operation of places of entertainment during Ramadan was dealt with by the law and this was a police responsibility.

Several houses of worship, religious schools, and homes of Muslim sects regarded as unorthodox were attacked, vandalized, forced to shut down, or prevented from being established by militant groups and mobs throughout the country, as the following examples illustrate.

On June 19, 2007, dozens of people from the FPI and other hardline groups demonstrated at the Mahmud Mosque in Singaparna, Tasikmalaya, West Java, demanding that the Ahmadiyah be dissolved. During the protest, the crowd damaged the mosque. The demonstration was allegedly in response to a regional meeting held by the Ahmadiyah community on April 22, 2007. Ahmadiyah leaders claimed to have received police permission to meet. Police quickly secured the mosque and contained the demonstration. Following the incident, Ahmadiyah leaders met with local Muslim leaders, and discussions between Ahmadiyah and Muslim youth groups yielded

a public discussion entitled, "The Country Must Protect Ahmadiyah Members." On June 26, 2007, however, the same group of demonstrators demanded that the Tasikmalaya Regional Parliament dissolve the Ahmadiyah. The Parliament rejected the demand, stating that religious affairs are the jurisdiction of the Central Government.

On April 9, 2007, police prevented hundreds of people from attacking an Islamic boarding school, owned by Tajul Ali Murtadho, using knives and machetes in Sampang, East Java. Local residents accused Murtadho of teaching a nontraditional version of Islam. Murthado was briefly detained by the police and released. Police temporarily closed the school, but it reopened after the situation was controlled.

On April 8, 2007, in Jember, East Java, an angry crowd surrounded a house belonging to Suwarno, the local chairman of Ikatan Ahlul Bait Indonesia (Ijabi), a Shi'a religious organization. They demanded Ijabi not spread Shi'a teachings. Local police removed three Ijabi leaders including Suwarno in an effort to pacify the crowd and calm the situation; the crowd dispersed. The Ijabi leaders were questioned by police and released the same day.

On March 27, 2007, Alih bin Hadi, a Muslim cleric in Bogor, West Java, was seized from a mosque by a mob of approximately 200 persons and beaten to death. Alih had preached that Muslims could travel to a nearby mosque, rather than to Mecca, for a pilgrimage. He also preached that it was permissible for Muslims to pay alms (zakat) after the Idul Fitri holiday. Alih's teachings had long angered local people. In December 2005, he signed an agreement to stop the mosque's activities and leave the area, but later returned and renewed his preaching activities. Alih had belonged to a larger group called Karisma Usada Mustika Foundation (Yaskum), which was being investigated by the Bogor branch of the MUI for heresy during the reporting period. Approximately 1,000 members of Yaskum demonstrated outside the main Bogor police station to protest Alih's killing. At the end of the reporting period, three men suspected of orchestrating Alih's killing had been detained by the police.

On December 24, 2006, at the urging of local clerics, 500 angry villagers in Jambesari village, Bondowoso Regency, East Java attacked 150 Ijabi members conducting routine prayers, destroying three houses, a small mosque and a car belonging to the local Ijabi chairman. Local Sunni residents objected to the presence of the Shi'a in their community and accused them of deviant Islamic beliefs and heresy. Local police removed and questioned 17 Ijabi members for 8 hours, but made no arrests. Two of the instigators, Sumito (aka Pak Lim) and Burasim, were subsequently arrested and charged with criminal destruction of property. Their trial, which is on-going, began on May 2, 2007. Prosecutors are asking for 6-month jail sentences. Ijabi leaders report that there have been no incidents since December.

On October 29, 2006, local residents went on a rampage and attacked six houses belonging to members of the Miftahus Salam mosque and religious school in Bogor, West Java. Residents believed that the mosque and school were the center of heretical teachings. Prior to the attack, Ustad Yusup Maulana, who is the principal of the school, was questioned by police. In a written statement, he admitted that he taught ideas not in accordance with Islamic law to his school's 40 students. His statement resulted in the residents' attack. Police detained Maulana and arrested two of the rioters, but it was still unclear whether they remained in custody at the end of the reporting period.

On August 8, 2006, hundreds of persons wearing masks burned down a boarding school belonging to Datuk Buluh Perindu, in Sidera, Central Sulawesi. Locals accused Perindu of being the spiritual teacher of Madi, a small minority Muslim sect. Police made no arrests.

On March 8, 2007, an estimated 200 members of FPI and Forum Betawi Rempug, a group composed of some indigenous citizens of Jakarta, attacked the Arastamar Evangelical School of Theology in East Jakarta demanding that it close down because its students sang late into the night, disturbing local community members. FPI also claimed that the school was illegal despite the fact that the school possessed official permits both for the existing building and a new dormitory. Police sent a detachment to stop the mob. The school is still functioning.

On September 2, 2006, a mob burned down the Evangelical Mission Church in Siompi, Aceh Singkil, after news spread that the church was planning a revival meeting. When a large number of Christians turned out for the meeting, they were confronted by several Muslims who disapproved of the revival meeting. The police did not intervene in the attack. Pastor Luther Saragih was briefly detained by police and told to send the Christians home. Later that night, an estimated 100 men on motorbikes set the church ablaze and went looking for Pastor Saragih and his pregnant wife. The pastor and his wife escaped into the jungle and hid there until they

were found unharmed by friends early the next morning. Pastor Saragih and his wife later moved to escape continued threats.

Muslims routinely reported difficulties in establishing mosques in Muslim-minority areas of Papua, North Sulawesi, and elsewhere.

At times, hardline religious groups used pressure, intimidation, or violence against those whose message they found offensive. Despite continued criticism from Islamic hardliners, the Liberal Islam Network (JIL) maintained public appeals for individual interpretation of Islamic doctrine and religious tolerance. JIL confronted hardliners in public forums, including seminars. Militants 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.

Unforced conversions between religious groups occurred, as allowed by law, but they remained a source of controversy. Some converted to marry a person of another religion; others converted in response to religious outreach or social activities organized by religious groups. Some Muslims accused Christian missionaries of using food and microcredit programs to lure poor Muslims to convert. Some converts felt compelled not to publicize the event for family and social reasons.

In Central Sulawesi, political and economic tensions between approximately equal populations of Christians and Muslims continued to cause sporadic violent episodes resulting in deaths during the reporting period. The crimes appeared to be religiously motivated.

On September 22, 2006, Fabianus Tibo, Dominggus da Silva, and Marianus Riwu were executed for their roles in connection with sectarian violence in Poso in 2000 and in the killing of 191 Muslims in a school. The executions led to violence in the areas of Flores and West Timor, Nusa Tenggara Province, and in Central Sulawesi, with some critics asserting that the sentencing and execution of the three Christian men was a case of discrimination by authorities. In Flores, 3,000 persons rioted and burned down at least 3 Government buildings. In Kefamananu and Atambua, West Timor, between 3,000 and 5,000 persons rioted, destroying Government buildings, homes, and vehicles.

In Central Sulawesi, on the same day as the executions, two Muslims, Arham Badaruddin and Rendi Rahman, were pulled from their car and beaten to death while passing through Taripa, a predominantly Christian village. Police arrested 17 people for participating in the killings, all of whom admitted their involvement. The suspects told police that the victims were killed because of the executions of Tibo, Riwu, and Da Silva. On April 2, 2007, prosecutors in Jakarta accused all 17 suspects under the country's antiterrorism laws in the brutal killing of the 2 Muslim men on September 23, 2006. The 17 suspects are the first Christians from Central Sulawesi accused of terrorism. In June 2007 prosecutors submitted closing arguments in these cases and decisions were expected to be issued in late summer 2007. While the maximum allowable sentence is the death penalty, prosecutors requested sentences of between 15 and 20 years for the perpetrators.

Several incidents occurred following the September 2006 executions, including 3 small bombings, attacks on both Muslims and Christians, and an attack on the Central Sulawesi police chief that resulted in the mobbing and destruction of his police helicopter by a crowd of 5,000. Police continued to investigate executed killer Fabianus Tibo's accusation that 16 other Christians had masterminded the Central Sulawesi violence. In April 2007 Central Sulawesi police again questioned 10 of the 16 people named by Tibo.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Mission, including the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, the Consulate General in Surabaya, and the Consulate in Medan, regularly engaged Government officials on specific religious freedom issues and also encouraged officials from other missions to discuss the subject with the Government. Embassy staff at all levels met frequently with religious leaders and human rights advocates to promote respect for religious freedom. Embassy staff also met regularly with NU and Muhammadiyah officials to clarify U.S. policy and discuss religious tolerance and other issues.

Mission outreach emphasized the importance of religious freedom and tolerance in a democratic society. During the reporting period, the Mission promoted pluralism and tolerance through exchanges and civil society programs.

Two hundred and thirteen Indonesians visited the United States on short-term programs that included examining the role of religion in U.S. society and politics. The programs allowed participants to explore first hand the integral role of religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and multiculturalism in a democratic society. For example, one youth leadership program offered Indonesian teenagers the opportunity to meet American peers in the United States. They participated in community ac-

tivities, met local religious leaders, and engaged in discussions on religious tolerance. Eight Fulbright scholars from the country went to the United States to pursue degrees directly related to the practice of religion in a democratic society. Three U.S. scholars came to Indonesia to teach and conduct research on similar topics.

The U.S. Mission reached millions through the production of media programs that provided in-depth coverage of religious freedom issues from an American perspective. These included the *Greetings from America* radio show, which periodically featured topics such as religious freedom, religious differences, tolerance, and pluralism from the perspective of Indonesian high school and college students living in the United States. This radio show aired 9 times a week to a potential audience of 10 million persons in 6 cities.

The U.S. Mission also funded the production of a television documentary series, *The Colors of Democracy*, which was produced jointly in the country and the United States. The series, which initially aired during evening newscasts from December 5, 2005, until January 25, 2006, periodically addressed topics such as freedom of religion and interfaith dialogue in the United States. The Mission contributed 6,000 sets of video compact discs (VCDs) based on, *The Colors of Democracy*, highlighting the positive impact of religious freedom, pluralism, and interfaith activities in schools and libraries. Through an agreement with the Ministry of Education that was signed on October 11, 2006, the VCDs were incorporated into the ministry's teacher training curriculum that encompasses 32,000 schools across the country.

The U.S. Mission continued to fund the Center for Religion and Cross-cultural Studies (CRCS) at Yogyakarta's Gajah Mada University. The CRCS worked with the national Radio Republik Indonesia to produce a bimonthly talk show that promoted religious freedom, tolerance, and democracy. In addition to the live radio broadcast, the program was screened on TVRI Yogyakarta, enabling dissemination of these ideas to local communities in Yogyakarta and surrounding areas of Central Java. The content of the program was published in the local newspaper. In December 2006 the CRCS extended public discussion on these issues through the establishment of a Web site.

The Mission supported the development and production of a 12 episode television talk show entitled *Islam Indonesia*. The program targeted the educated middle class and young professionals and was televised every 2 weeks, providing the opportunity for the public to listen to, watch, and actively engage in debates through live phone-ins. Topics discussed included freedom of religion, tolerance, and pluralism. Each episode received between 12 and 33 phone calls.

In conjunction with a weekly magazine, the Mission supported publication of supplemental editions to provide objective information on the efforts of prodemocratic Muslim networks to support the democratic process, including religious freedom, tolerance, civil rights, and democracy. The magazine distributes 90,000 copies nationwide on a weekly basis with an estimated readership of 450,000 persons.

The Mission also supported campus seminar programs aimed at strengthening supporters of pluralism on Islamic campuses and reinforce an understanding of religious freedom, tolerance, pluralism, and gender equity. Public discussions were held on several campuses in Jakarta, Serang, Rangkasbitung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Mataram, and Medan in cooperation with state Islamic universities and public universities such as Gajah Mada University and University of North Sumatra. More than 1,500 students from a wide range of backgrounds and 50 national and local speakers were involved in the discussions.

JAPAN

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 145,884 square miles and a population of 128 million. The Government does not require religious groups to report their membership, so

it was difficult to accurately determine the number of adherents to different religious groups. The Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2005 that membership claims by religious groups totaled 211 million persons. This number, which is nearly twice Japan's population, reflects many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions. For example, it is very common for Japanese to practice both Buddhist and Shinto rites.

According to the Agency's annual yearbook, 107 million persons identify themselves as Shinto, 91 million as Buddhist, 3 million as Christian, and 10 million follow "other" religions, including Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, and Perfect Liberty. Academics estimate that there are 120,000 Muslims in Japan, 10 percent of which are Japanese citizens. The Israeli Embassy estimates that there are approximately 2,000 Jews in the country, most of them foreign born.

As of March 2005, under the 1951 Religious Juridical Persons Law, the Government recognized 157 schools of Buddhism. The six major schools of Buddhism are Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Zen (Soto and Rinzai sects), Nichiren, and Narabukkyo. In addition, there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations, including Soka Gakkai, which reported a membership of eight million. The two main schools of Shintoism are Jinjahoncho and Kyohashinto. Roman Catholicism and Protestantism had modest followings.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

As of December 2005, 182,796 out of 223,871 religious groups were certified by the Government as religious organizations with corporate status, according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The Government does not require religious groups to register or apply for certification; however, certified religious organizations receive tax benefits. More than 82 percent of religious groups had been certified by 2005.

In the wake of the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by Aum Shinrikyo, the Religious Juridical Persons Law was amended in 1996 to provide the Government with the authority to supervise certified religious groups. The amended law requires certified religious organizations to disclose their assets to the Government and empowers the Government to investigate possible violations of regulations governing for-profit activities. Authorities have the right to suspend a religious organization's for-profit activities if they violate these regulations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Unlike in previous reporting periods, there were no reports of restrictions on religious freedom.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

KIRIBATI

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

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago with a land area of 265 square miles and a population of 107,800. Missionaries introduced Christianity into the area in the mid-19th century. According to 2005 Government statistics, major religious groups include: the Roman Catholic Church, 55 percent; Kiribati Protestant Church, 36 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 3 percent; the Baha'i Faith, 2 percent; and the Seventh-day Adventists, 2 percent. Several of the smaller Christian churches claim to have higher numbers of adherents, but there is no independent confirmation. Persons with no religious affiliation account for less than 1 percent of the population. Members of the Catholic Church are concentrated in the northern islands, while Protestants are the majority in the southern islands.

Missionaries are present and operate freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion. The Government does not favor a particular religious group, nor were there separate legal categories for different religious groups.

Christmas, Easter, and National Gospel Day are official religious holidays.

There are no provisions for registering religious groups, nor are there consequences for not registering.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Religious groups generally praised the Government for its role in protecting religious freedom. There were isolated problems for religious groups viewed as outside the mainstream desiring to establish churches in some villages and on outer islands. In a few cases, traditional leaders such as chiefs prevented groups from proselytizing or holding meetings. Not wanting to invite conflict, some non-mainstream groups did not attempt to proselytize in unwelcoming villages.

Nonreligious persons, who constitute a very small minority, did not suffer discrimination. Most governmental and social functions begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister or other church official.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief;" however, in practice the Government severely restricted 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 status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to interfere with the individual's ability to choose and to manifest his or her religious belief. The regime continued to repress the religious activities of unauthorized religious groups. Recent refugee, defector, missionary, and nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports indicate that religious persons engaging in proselytizing in the country, those who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating across the border in the People's Republic of China (China), and specifically, those repatriated from China and found to have been in contact with foreigners or missionaries, have been arrested and subjected to harsh penalties. Refugees and defectors continued to allege that they witnessed the arrests and execution of members of underground Christian churches by the regime in prior years. Due to the country's inaccessibility and the inability to gain timely information, the continuation of this activity during the time period covered by this report remained difficult to verify. The Government allowed foreigners to attend Government-sponsored religious services.

There were no reports available on societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the country. Since 2001 the Secretary has designated the country a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) 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 with other countries and in multilateral forums.

The Government does not allow representatives of foreign governments, journalists, or other invited guests freedom of movement that would enable them to fully assess human rights conditions or confirm reported abuses. This report is based on information from interviews, press reports, NGO reports, missionary, refugee and defector testimony obtained over the past decade, supplemented where possible by information drawn from more recent reports from visitors to the country and NGO representatives working on the Chinese border. Refugee and defector testimony is often dated because of the time lapse between departures from the country and contact with organizations able to document human rights conditions. This report cites specific sources and timeframes wherever possible, and reports are corroborated to the extent possible. While limited in detail, the information in this report is indicative of the situation with regard to religious freedom in the country in recent years.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 47,000 square miles and a population estimated at 22.7 million. The number of religious believers was unknown but was estimated by the Government to be 10,000 Protestants, 10,000 Buddhists, and 4,000 Catholics. Estimates by South Korean and international church-related groups were considerably higher. In addition, the Chondogyo Young Friends Party, a Government-approved group based on a traditional religious movement, had approximately 40,000 practitioners, according to the Government. 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 country had no priests but held weekly prayer services at the Changchung Catholic Church in Pyongyang. However, some doubt that all of those attending Mass were Catholic. According to state-controlled media reports, following the death of Pope John Paul II in April 2005, a memorial service was held at this church, and services were also held at family worship places across the country.

In Pyongyang there were reportedly three state-controlled Christian churches: two Protestant churches under lay leadership—the Bongsu and Chilgol churches—and the Changchung Roman Catholic Church. One of the Protestant churches is dedicated to the memory of former leader Kim Il-sung's mother, Kang Pan-sok, who was a Presbyterian deaconess. The number of congregants regularly worshiping at these churches is unknown.

The Presbyterian Church of Korea in the South is partnering with the Christian Association in North Korea to rebuild Bongsu Church. In the fall of 2006, a delegation of 90 Christians from South Korea visited the Bongsu church to celebrate completion of its first phase of renovation, according to press reports. According to religious leaders who travel to the country, there were Protestant pastors at these churches, although it was not known if they were resident or were visitors.

In its July 2002 report to the U.N. Human Rights Committee, the country reported the existence of 500 "family worship centers." The country did not define the

term; however, observers stated that "family worship centers" were part of the state-controlled Korean Christian Federation, while "underground churches" were not part of the Federation and were not recognized by the Government. Some NGOs and academics estimate there may be up to several hundred-thousand underground Christians in the country. Others question the existence of a large-scale underground church or conclude that no reliable estimate of the number of underground religious believers exists. Individual underground congregations are reportedly very small and confined to private homes. At the same time, some NGOs report that the individual churches are connected to each other through well-established networks. The regime has not allowed outsiders the access necessary to confirm such claims.

There were an estimated 300 Buddhist temples. Most were regarded as cultural relics, but religious activity was permitted in some. A few Buddhist temples and relics have been renovated or restored in recent years under a broad effort aimed at "preserving the Korean nation's cultural heritage." In October 2005 tourists from the Republic of Korea (ROK) and other international tourists were permitted to view the reconstruction of the Shingye or Singyesa (or Holy Valley) Temple, which was destroyed during the Korean War of 1950–53. The reconstruction was funded by the ROK Government and foreign tourists and was expected to be completed in 2007. A South Korean monk, the first to permanently reside in North Korea, has lived at the temple since 2004, but was expected to serve primarily as a guide for visiting tourists rather than as a pastor caring for Buddhists living in the area.

According to the country's media accounts, renovation of the Ryongthong temple in Kaesong was completed in early 2005. A restoration ceremony was held in October 2005 with participants from North and South Korea and Japan. Foreign diplomats in Pyongyang who visited the site were told that the two monks living there may be joined by more. The Government announced in June 2007 that 500 monks and Buddhist followers were making day-long pilgrimages to the temple strictly for religious purposes. Plans were being made for 2,000 more Buddhist followers from South Korea to make the pilgrimage later in the year. State-controlled press reported on several occasions that Buddhist ceremonies had been carried out in various locations. Official reporting also linked descriptions of such ceremonies with the broader theme of Korean unification.

The Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church opened in Pyongyang on August 13, 2006. The church was reportedly commissioned by Kim Jong-il after he visited an Orthodox cathedral in Russia in 2002. According to a Russian press report, a Russian priest served the cathedral, and a religious leader who traveled to the country confirmed that the church was run by a priest of North Korean origin who had studied in Russia. The purported aim of the church was primarily to provide pastoral care of Russians in the country, but one religious leader with access to the country speculated that the church likely extended care to all Orthodox Koreans as well. As with other religious groups, no reliable data exists on the number of Orthodox believers in the country.

Several foreigners residing in Pyongyang attended Korean-language services at the Christian churches on a regular basis. Some foreigners who had visited the country stated that church services appeared staged and contained political content supportive of the regime, in addition to religious themes. Foreign legislators attending services in Pyongyang in previous years noted that congregations arrived at and departed services as groups on tour buses, and some observed that they did not include any children. Other foreigners noted that they were not permitted to have contact with congregants. Foreign observers had limited ability to ascertain the level of Government control over these groups, but it was generally assumed they are monitored closely. According to the 2006 Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) White Paper, there was no evidence that any of the central religious organizations maintained branches in the provinces.

Overseas faith-based aid organizations have been active in responding to the country's food and humanitarian crises. However, many such organizations report that they are not allowed to proselytize, their contact with nationals is limited and strictly monitored, and they are accompanied by Government escorts at all times.

In March 2007 the Barnabas Fund, a Christian charity, helped to open a bakery in Songbong. A South Korean Buddhist group, Join Together Society (JTS), continued to operate a factory in the Rajin-Sonbong Free Trade Zone to produce food for preschool children, which it has done since 1998. Catholics of the Seoul archdiocese continued to operate a noodle factory that they opened in 2001.

The regime has allowed a number of high-profile religious leaders to visit the country. In March 2007 Bishop Lazarus You Heung-sik of Daejeon, president of Caritas Corea, led a 10-member team on a visit to the country in the fifth such visit since September 2006. Following the March trip, Caritas reached an agreement with local officials to continue and expand aid for medical and food-producing facilities,

according to press reports. According to the agreement, in 2007 Caritas will provide medical equipment for a hospital, equipment for a seed-potato production facility, and medical support for clinics in a rural area. In May 2007, as part of this project, a Catholic delegation visited 17 pediatric hospitals in Pyongyang and Nampo, among other areas, where they delivered medication for tuberculosis.

In early February 2007 more than 140 members of the Korean Catholic Farmers' Movement from 15 South Korean dioceses met at Mt. Kumgang for the group's annual general assembly meeting, according to a press report. Officials managing Mt. Kumgang's special tourism zone had suggested a project in which the North would provide farmland and workers while the Farmers' Movement would provide technology.

Evangelical pastor Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose-Driven Life*, announced in July 2006 that he had been invited by the Government to preach to an audience of 15,000 Christians in the country in March 2007. Warren was to visit the country in July 2006 to plan the 2007 preaching trip, but the planning trip was postponed following the Government's July 4–5, 2006 missile launches. In February 2007 he announced that he would pursue a later date for the preaching trip, possibly in the summer, according to a press report.

Some South Korean religious groups visited the country to promote reunification. In May 2007 a South Korean interfaith delegation visited Pyongyang where it met with the North Korean Government's Council of Religionists to discuss reunification of the peninsula. Following instructions from the Vatican, the Catholic members of the delegation refrained from celebrating mass to avoid giving the Eucharist to North Koreans posing as Catholics.

In April 2006 the Catholic archdiocese of Seoul sent a 61-member delegation to the country, led by Mgr. Thomas Aquinas Choi Chang-hwa, the director of the National Reconciliation Committee. During the visit the Catholic Association of North Korea proposed a joint visit to the Vatican with the Seoul archdiocese, which the association said it hoped would lead to an audience with the pope. The Vatican has thus far discouraged such a visit, citing ongoing concerns about the juridical and canonical status of the state-founded Catholic Association of North Korea.

In June 2005 Venerable Bubjang, head of the Jogye Order, the largest Buddhist sect in the ROK, and at the time the chair of the national council on religious leaders in that country, traveled to Pyongyang to mark the fifth anniversary of the June 2000 inter-Korean summit.

In October 2005 a delegation from the state-controlled Korean Christian Federation (DPRK) attended an international solidarity meeting in Frankfurt, Germany, sponsored by the German Evangelical Church, according to a Government media report.

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 worked in the foreign trade sector. In 2000 a Protestant seminary was reopened with assistance from foreign missionary groups. Critics, including at least one foreign sponsor, charged that the Government opened the seminary only to facilitate reception of assistance funds from foreign faith-based NGOs. The Chosun Christian Federation, a religious group believed to be controlled by the Government, contributed to the curriculum used by the seminary. In September 2003 construction reportedly was completed of the Pyongyang Theological Academy, a graduate institution that trains pastors affiliated with the Korean Christian Federation. In December 2005 citizens who were expected to staff Pyongyang's Russian Orthodox Cathedral traveled to Vladivostok for training in ordination and other rituals.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," but the Government did not respect this right. In practice the Government severely restricted religious freedom, including by discouraging organized religious activities except those controlled by officially recognized groups. Genuine religious freedom does not exist.

The cult of personality of Kim Jong-il and his father remained important ideological underpinnings of the regime, at times seeming to resemble tenets of a state religion. Faced with famine and the succession process in the mid-1990s, Kim Jong-il's regime increasingly emphasized a "military-first" policy to gradually replace *juche* (often translated as extreme self-reliance) as the de facto ruling logic. However, *juche* remained an important ideological concept. Indoctrination was intended to ensure loyalty to the system and the leadership, as well as conformity to the state's ideology and authority. Refusal on religious or other grounds to accept the leader

as the supreme authority, exemplifying the state and society's needs, was regarded as opposition to the national interest and sometimes resulted in severe punishment. NGOs reported that citizens are exhorted to glorify Kim Jong-il.

Since the late 1980s, as a part of the campaign highlighting Kim Il-sung's "benevolent politics," the regime allowed the formation of several Government-sponsored religious 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 doctrine. According to NGOs, these religious organizations have been organized primarily as counterparts to foreign religious organizations or international aid agencies, rather than as instruments to guarantee and support free religious activities. Since 1992 the Constitution has authorized religious gatherings and provided for "the right to build buildings for religious use." However, this right is enjoyed only by officially recognized religious groups. The Constitution stipulates that religion "should not be used for purposes of dragging in foreign powers or endangering public security." Ownership of Bibles or other religious materials is reportedly illegal and may be punished by imprisonment or execution.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice severely restricted the practice of religion. The 2006 KINU White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea indicated that the regime utilizes authorized religious entities for external propaganda and political purposes and that citizens are strictly barred from entering places of worship. Ordinary citizens consider such sites to be primarily "sightseeing spots for foreigners." KINU also concluded that the lack of churches or religious facilities in the provinces indicates that ordinary citizens do not enjoy religious freedom.

Little is known about the day-to-day life of religious persons in the country. Members of Government-controlled religious groups did not appear to suffer discrimination. In fact, some reports claimed, and circumstantial evidence suggested, that many, if not most of these groups, have been organized by the regime for propaganda and political purposes, including meeting with foreign religious visitors. There have also been reports that funds and goods that are donated to Government-approved churches are channeled through the Korean Workers Party (the only party in the country). There are unconfirmed reports that nonreligious children of religious believers may be employed in mid-level positions in the Government. In the past, such individuals suffered broad discrimination with sometimes severe penalties or even imprisonment. Members of underground churches or those connected to border missionary activity were reportedly regarded as subversive elements.

The 2006 KINU White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea concluded, "North Korea utilizes religious activities only for political and economic goals; namely, to improve its international image, to secure humanitarian assistance from overseas, and to earn foreign currency."

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government deals harshly with all opponents, including those who engage in religious practices deemed unacceptable by the regime. Religious and human rights groups outside of the country have provided numerous, usually unconfirmed, reports in previous years that members of underground churches have been beaten, arrested, tortured, or killed because of their religious beliefs. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 persons were believed to be held in detention camps in remote areas, many for religious and political reasons. Prison conditions were harsh, and refugees and defectors who had been in prison stated that prisoners held on the basis of their religious beliefs generally were treated worse than other inmates. A refugee who arrived in South Korea in 2001 claimed that he was tortured for his Christian beliefs after a Bible was discovered in his belongings.

Over the years there have been unconfirmed reports from a few defectors alleging the testing on human subjects of a variety of chemical and biological agents up through the early 1990s. Some accounts have alleged that political or religious detainees were specifically selected for this testing. The Government effectively bars outside observers from investigating such reports.

NGOs, defectors, and refugees have reported that the Government executed opponents of the regime in recent years. Executed individuals reportedly included some targeted for religious activities such as proselytism and contact with foreigners or missionaries while in China.

Defector reports indicated that the regime has increased its repression and persecution of unauthorized religious groups in recent years, but access to information on current conditions was limited. Despite these restrictions, reports indicated that contacts with religious personnel both inside the country and across the border in

China appeared to be increasing. Reports from NGOs, refugees, defectors, and missionaries indicated that many persons engaging in religious proselytizing, those who had ties to overseas evangelical groups operating across the border in China, and, specifically, those repatriated and found to have contacted foreigners, including Christian missionaries, outside the country have been arrested and subjected to harsh punishment.

During the reporting period, ROK media reports, including testimony from a 2003 defector, indicated that citizens who received help from churches inside China were considered political criminals and received harsher treatment. This included imprisonment, prolonged detention without charge, torture, or execution.

The Government reportedly was concerned that faith-based South Korean relief and refugee assistance efforts along the northeast border of China had both humanitarian and political goals, including overthrow of the regime, and alleged that these groups were involved in intelligence gathering. The official Korean Workers Party newspaper criticized "imperialists and reactionaries" for trying to use ideological and cultural infiltration, including religion, to destroy socialism from within.

In March 2006 the Government reportedly sentenced Son Jong-nam to death for espionage. However, NGOs claimed that the sentence against Son was based on his contacts with Christian groups in China, his proselytizing activities, and alleged sharing of information with his brother in the ROK. Son's brother reported that information indicated that Son was alive as of spring 2007. Because the country effectively bars outside observers from investigating such reports, it was not possible to verify the Government's claims about Son Jong-nam's activities or determine whether he had been executed.

The whereabouts of South Korean missionary Kim Dong-shik, who disappeared in 2000 near the country's border with China, remained unknown. He was allegedly kidnapped by North Korean agents while assisting North Korean refugees in China.

NGOs reported as recently as 2001 that the Government conducts "education sessions" to identify Christian leaders so that they can be apprehended in periodic crackdowns.

Unverified news reports in recent years indicated that the Government has increased the reward for information on any person doing missionary work in the Chinese border region.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; no information was available on societal attitudes toward religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the country and has no official presence there but sought to address its religious freedom concerns as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since 2001 the Secretary has designated the country 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 fora and bilaterally with other governments, particularly those that have diplomatic relations with the country. In 2006 several U.S. State Department officials testified before the House International Relations Committee on the country's human rights record and U.S. Government efforts to implement the 2004 North Korean Human Rights Act. During a hearing in April 2007, Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea Jay Lefkowitz criticized the North Korean Government for abducting South Korean and Japanese citizens and emphasized the need to empower North Koreans through broadcasting. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill has repeatedly stated that dialogue on the country's human rights record and establishment of benchmarks for improvement would be necessary for the country to join the international community and normalize relations with the United States. Testifying before the HIRC in November 2006, Undersecretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns stated that the United States will continue to raise the issue of human rights with the Government. The U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom also has repeat-

edly raised awareness of the deplorable human rights conditions in the country through speeches before U.S. audiences.

U.S. officials have also urged other countries, including the ROK, Japan, and the European Union, to join the growing international campaign urging the Government to address and improve its human rights conditions and abuses of religious freedom. Building on the efforts to address the issue of human rights in the country at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, which adopted several resolutions on the issue in previous years, the United States has continued to work with other concerned governments at the U.N. Human Rights Council, its successive body. In December 2006 the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution, which the United States had cosponsored, that condemned the country's poor human rights record, expressing "very serious concern" at "continuing reports of systemic, widespread and grave violations of human rights." The resolution called on the country to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments to which it is a party, and it further urged the Government to invite U.N. special representatives to visit and to ensure that humanitarian organizations have free access to the country.

In 2005 and 2006 the U.S. Government funded a series of four conferences and related programs on human rights in the country. In addition, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor continued to provide funding to the National Endowment for Democracy to support ROK-based NGOs in their efforts to improve and expand monitoring and reporting of the human rights situation in the country. Radio Free Asia and Voice of America also provide regular Korean-language broadcasting.

The country remains subject to the economic restrictions of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment on international trade. Following CPC designation in 2001, these restrictions were also tied to the country's status under the International Religious Freedom Act.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 38,023 square miles and a population of 48,846,800. According to a 2005 Government survey, when the population stood at 47,041,000, the numbers of adherents of the predominant religions were: Buddhism, 10,726,000; Protestantism, 8,616,000; Roman Catholicism, 5,146,000; Confucianism, 105,000; Won Buddhism, 130,000; and other religions, 247,000. A total of 22,071,000 citizens did not practice any religion. The percentage of the population adhering to each religious tradition has remained approximately the same in recent years.

No official figures were available on the membership of other religious groups, which included Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventist Church, Daesun Jinrihoe, and Islam.

Buddhism has 27 orders. The Catholic Church has 16 dioceses. Within the major Protestant traditions there are a total of 121 denominations, approximately 90 percent of which are separate Presbyterian groups. The Christian Council of Korea (CCK) reported that there are an estimated 75 Protestant denominations with at least 100 congregations nationwide, including Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and the Korean Gospel Church Assembly.

According to Gallup Korea's 2004 survey on the state of religion in the country, 36 percent of those who practiced a faith reported that they attended religious services or rituals at a church or temple more than once a week, 10.6 percent attended two to three times per month, 20.6 percent attended once or twice a year, and 4.9 percent did not attend services. Of those who attended religious services more than once a week, Protestants had the highest attendance rate at 71 percent, Catholics 42.9 percent, and Buddhists 3.5 percent.

Foreign-based missionary groups operated freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

There are no Government-established requirements for religious recognition. The Traditional Temples Preservation Law protects cultural properties including Buddhist temples, which receive some subsidies from the Government for their preservation and upkeep. Buddha's Birthday and Christmas are the only national holidays that are religious in nature. Recognition of these 2 days does not negatively impact other religious groups.

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

The Religious Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism takes the lead in organizing groups such as the Korean 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 provides no exemption or alternative civilian service for those who have a religious objection to service in the armed forces. According to the National Assembly's Defense Committee, in 2006 Jehovah's Witnesses accounted for all of the 781 men who rejected military service. Of those 781, 548 were given prison sentences of at least 18 months, 1 was given a prison sentence of more than 2 years, 225 are awaiting trial, and 7 were released without charge. Those sentenced were allowed to conduct their own religious services in prison. In 2005 the National Human Rights Commission recommended the Government recognize an individual's right, based on religious conviction, to refuse compulsory military service, and called for an alternative form of service. In April 2006 the Ministry of National Defense established a 17-member committee, made up of scholars, lawyers, journalists, religious leaders, civic activists, and military officials, to study ways to introduce and establish the standards for such alternative service. From April 2006 to March 2007, the committee met 8 times to discuss how to introduce such a system. On June 6, 2007, the committee concluded that it was too early to acknowledge those who have religious objections to service in the military and to introduce an alternative service system.

Other than the contentious objectors mentioned above, there were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Religious leaders regularly met both privately and under Government auspices to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. These meetings were given wide and favorable coverage by the media. For example, the Korean Council of Religious Leaders holds an annual event, the ROK Religious Culture Festival, which aims to promote reconciliation and mutual understanding among religious groups. The most recent festival was held on October 21, 2006, at Seoul City Hall Plaza and was attended by the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, Christian Churches of Korea, Won Buddhism, the Korea Religious Council, and the Catholic Church, among other 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 officials also met regularly with members of various religious communities to discuss issues related to religious freedom. For example, in July 2007 the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) met with two representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss the problems faced by their followers who reject military service as conscientious objectors. During the meeting the DCM affirmed the U.S. Government's strong support for free expression of religion.

LAOS

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

During the period covered by this report, the overall status of respect for religious freedom did not significantly change. While respect for non-Protestant groups appeared to improve slightly, respect for Protestant groups appeared to decline in several parts of the country. In most areas, officials generally respected the constitutionally guaranteed rights of members of most faiths to worship, albeit within strict constraints imposed by the Government. Authorities in some areas continued to display intolerance for minority religious practice especially by Protestant Christians. The Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), a popular front organization for the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), was responsible for oversight of religious practice. The Prime Minister's Decree on Religious Practice (Decree 92) was the principal legal instrument defining rules for religious practice. Decree 92 also institutionalized the Government's role as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities. Although this decree has contributed to greater religious tolerance since it was promulgated in 2002, authorities have increasingly used its many conditions to restrict some aspects of religious practice.

During the period covered by this report, some local officials pressured minority Protestants to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages. Such cases occurred in Bolikhamsai, Houaphan, and Luang Namtha provinces. Arrests and detention of Protestants occurred in Luang Namtha, Oudomsai, Salavan, Savannakhet, and Vientiane provinces. Two Buddhist monks were arrested in Bolikhamsai Province for having been ordained without Government authorization. In some areas, minority Protestants were forbidden from gathering to worship. In areas where Protestants were actively proselytizing, local officials have sometimes subjected them to "reeducation."

A Christian man in Salavan Province was arrested on April 1, 2006 for refusing to renounce his faith and placed under house arrest until his release in late July 2006. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were four known religious prisoners, as well as at least seven other Protestants who were apparently being detained without charges for other than religious reasons, but in whose cases religion was suspected to have played a role. Conflicts between ethnic groups and movement among villages sometimes exacerbated religious tensions. The efforts of some Protestant congregations to establish churches independent of the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) continued to cause strains within the Protestant community.

U.S. Embassy officials and visiting U.S. Government representatives discussed the need for greater religious freedom at all levels of the Government. The Embassy sought to encourage religious tolerance through this dialogue. The Embassy maintained frequent contact with religious leaders, and official visitors from the U.S. Government, including the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and a Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, have encouraged greater religious freedom in the country during their meetings with Lao officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 85,000 square miles and a population of 6.4 million. Almost all ethnic or "lowland" Lao are followers of Theravada Buddhism; however, lowland Lao constitute only 40–50 percent of the population. The remainder of the population belongs to at least 48 distinct ethnic minority groups. Most of these ethnic minorities are practitioners of animism, with beliefs that vary greatly among groups. Animism is predominant among most Sino-Thai groups, such as the Thai

Dam and Thai Daeng, as well as among Mon-Khmer and Burmo-Tibetan groups. Even among lowland Lao, many pre-Buddhist animistic religious beliefs have been incorporated into Theravada Buddhist practice. Catholics and Protestants constitute approximately 2 percent of the population. Other minority religious groups include those practicing 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 as well as the center of community life in rural areas. In most lowland Lao villages, religious tradition remains strong. Most Buddhist men spend some part of their lives as monks in temples, 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 temples. In addition, there are approximately 450 nuns, generally older women who are widowed, residing 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.

There are four Mahayana Buddhist temples in Vientiane, two serving the ethnic Vietnamese community and two serving the ethnic Chinese community. Buddhist monks from Vietnam, China, and India have visited these temples freely to conduct services and minister to worshippers. There are at least four large Mahayana Buddhist pagodas in other urban centers and smaller Mahayana temples in villages near the borders of Vietnam and China.

The Roman Catholic Church is officially recognized by the LFNC. There are approximately 45,000 Catholics, many of whom are ethnic Vietnamese, concentrated in major urban centers and surrounding areas along the Mekong River in the central and southern regions of the country. The Catholic Church has an established presence in five of the most populous central and southern provinces, and Catholics are able to worship openly. The Catholic Church's activities are more circumscribed in the north. There are four bishops, two located in Vientiane and others located in the cities of Thakhek and Pakse. One of the two bishops resident in Vientiane oversees the Vientiane Diocese and is responsible for the central part of the country. The second bishop resident in Vientiane is the Bishop of Luang Prabang. He is assigned to the northern part of the country, but while the Government did not permit him to take up his post, it did permit him to travel to visit church congregations in the north. The church's property in Luang Prabang was seized after 1975, and there is no longer a parsonage in that city. An informal Catholic training center in Thakhek prepared a small number of priests to serve the Catholic community. Several foreign nuns temporarily serve in the Vientiane diocese.

Approximately 400 Protestant congregations conduct services throughout the country for a community that has grown rapidly in the past decade. Church officials estimate Protestants to number as many as 100,000.

Many Protestants are members of ethnic Mon-Khmer groups, especially the Khmu in the north and the Brou in the central provinces. Numbers of Protestants also have expanded rapidly in the Hmong and Yao communities. In urban areas, Protestantism has attracted many lowland Lao followers. Most Protestants are concentrated in Vientiane Municipality, in the provinces of Vientiane, Sayaboury, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Bolikhamsai, Savannakhet, Champassak, and Attapeu, as well as in the former Saisomboun Special Zone, but smaller congregations are located throughout the country.

The LFNC officially recognizes only two Protestant groups—the LEC and the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and requires all non-Catholic Christian groups to operate under one of these organizations.

Seventh-day Adventists number slightly more than 1,000 country-wide, with congregations in Vientiane Municipality as well as Bokeo, Bolikhamsai, Champassak, Luang Prabang, and Xieng Khouang provinces.

Christian denominations that have some following in the country, but which are not recognized by the Government, include the Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Lutherans, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Baptists. Official membership numbers are not available.

All approved Christian religious groups own properties in Vientiane Municipality, although some of their properties are not officially recognized by the Government.

In addition, the Protestant LEC maintains properties in the cities of Savannakhet and Pakse. Three informal churches, one for English-speakers, one for Korean-speakers, and one for Chinese-speakers, serve Vientiane's foreign Protestant community.

There are approximately 400 adherents of Islam in the country, the vast majority of whom are foreign permanent residents of South Asian and Cambodian (Cham) origin. There are two active mosques in Vientiane that minister to the Sunni branch of Islam, but both are open to visits by Shi'ite worshippers as well.

The Baha'i Faith has approximately 8,000 adherents and 4 centers: 2 in Vientiane Municipality, 1 in Vientiane Province, and 1 in Savannakhet Province. A small number of Baha'i also live in Khammouane Province and in Pakse City.

Small groups of followers of Confucianism and Taoism practice their beliefs in the larger cities.

Although the Government prohibits foreigners from proselytizing, some resident foreigners associated with private businesses or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) quietly engage in religious activity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, promulgated in 1991, provides for freedom of religion; however, local authorities in particular sometimes violated this right. Article 30 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, a fact frequently cited by officials in reference to religious tolerance. Article 9 of the Constitution, however, discourages all acts that create divisions among religious groups and persons. The Government has interpreted this clause restrictively, and both local and central Government officials widely refer to Article 9 as a reason for placing constraints on religious practice, especially proselytizing and the expansion of Protestantism among minority groups. Although official pronouncements acknowledge the existence of different religious groups, they emphasize religion's potential to divide, distract, or destabilize.

A person arrested or convicted for religious offenses, as with most other alleged civil liberties violations, had little protection under the law. Detained persons may be held for lengthy periods without trial. Court judges, not juries, decided guilt or innocence in court cases, and the defense rights of the accused were limited. All religious groups, including Buddhists, practice their faith in an atmosphere in which application of the law is arbitrary. Certain actions interpreted by officials as threatening brought harsh punishment. Religious practice was "free" only if practitioners stayed within tacitly understood guidelines of activity acceptable to the Government.

The Government typically refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing on the part of its officials, even in egregious cases of religious persecution. Blame was usually attributed to the victims rather than the persecuting officials. In some past cases, officials concocted patently unbelievable explanations for events in order to exonerate local officials. While the Government has sometimes admitted that local officials are often part of the problem, it has been unwilling to take action against officials who have violated laws and regulations on religious freedom.

In its 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, district, and province where the activity occurs and, in some cases, requiring approval from the central level LFNC.

Decree 92 legitimizes proselytizing by Lao citizens, printing religious materials, owning and building houses of worship, and maintaining contact with overseas religious groups—all contingent upon a strict approval process. In practice, the Government used the approval process to restrict the religious activities of certain groups and has effectively prevented some religious denominations from importing and printing religious materials as well as constructing houses of worship.

The Government required several religious groups, apparently with the exception of Buddhists and Catholics, to report membership information periodically to the Religious Affairs Department of the LFNC. The Government also restricted the publication of religious materials that applied to most religious groups, again excepting Buddhists.

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 presumed both a right and a duty to over-

see religious practice at all levels to ensure religious practice fills these roles in society. In effect this has led the Government to intervene in the activities of minority religious groups, particularly Protestants, on the grounds that their practices did not promote national interests or demonstrated disloyalty to the Government.

Although the state is secular in name and practice, members of governmental institutions are by-and-large followers of Theravada Buddhism, the religion of the majority of the ethnic Lao population. The Government's exemption of Buddhism from many of the Decree 92 restrictions imposed on other organized religions and its promotion of Buddhism as an element of the country's cultural and spiritual identity gave Theravada Buddhism the status of an unofficial national religion. Many persons regarded Buddhism as both an integral part of the national culture and a way of life. The increasing incorporation of Buddhist ritual and ceremony in state functions reflected the elevated status of Buddhism in society.

In some areas where animism predominated 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 discouraged animist practices that it regarded as outdated, unhealthy, or illegal, such as the practice in some tribes of killing children born with defects or of burying the bodies of deceased relatives under peoples' homes.

Although the Government did not maintain diplomatic relations with the Holy See, representatives of the Papal Nuncio visited from Thailand and coordinated with the Government on assistance programs, especially for lepers and persons with disabilities.

Since 2001 the Government has more closely scrutinized the activities of Laos' small Muslim population but has not interfered with the community's religious activities. Muslims in the small Islamic community were able to practice their faith openly and attend the two active mosques. Daily prayers and the weekly Jumaat prayer on Fridays proceeded unobstructed, and all Islamic celebrations were allowed. Muslims were permitted to go on the Hajj. Groups that conduct Tabligh teachings for the faithful came from Thailand once or twice per year. In 2006, a local Muslim joined with members of other religious groups to represent the Government at an Interfaith Conference on Religion in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The Government observes two religious holidays, the That Luang Festival (the end of Buddhist Lent) and the Buddhist New Year. It recognized the popularity and cultural significance of Buddhist festivals, and most senior officials openly attended them. The Government generally allowed major religious festivals of all established congregations without hindrance.

Authorities require new denominations to join other religious groups with similar historical antecedents despite clear differences between the groups' beliefs. In March 2004 the LFNC's Order Number 1 required all Protestant groups to become a part of the LEC or the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The order stated that no other denominations would be permitted to register, a measure to prevent "disharmony" in the religious community. Although the Prime Minister's Decree on Religious Practice establishes procedures for new denominations to register, the Government's desire to consolidate religious practice for purposes of control has effectively blocked new registrations. In theory, denominations not registered with the LFNC were not allowed to practice their faith.

There was no religious instruction in public schools nor were there any parochial or religiously-affiliated schools operating in the country. However, several private pre-schools and English language schools received support from religious groups abroad. In practice many boys spent some time in Buddhist temples, where they received instruction in religion as well as in academics. Temples traditionally have filled the role of schools and continued to play this role in smaller communities where formal education was limited or unavailable. Christian denominations, particularly the LEC, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Catholic Church, operated Sunday schools for children and young persons. Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies conducted religious training for children as well as for adult members.

The Government requires and routinely granted permission for formal links with co-religionists in other countries. In practice the line between formal and informal links was blurred, and relations generally were established without much difficulty.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government's tolerance of religion varied by region and by religion. Throughout the country, however, religious practice was restrained by official rules and policies that only allowed religious groups to practice their faith under circumscribed conditions. LEC members and other Protestant groups that have wanted to be recognized as separate from the LEC continued to be the targets of most restrictions. The Buddhist Supreme Patriarch, or Sangkarat, maintained close links to the Gov-

ernment. Government officials commonly invited Buddhist monks to bless newly opened Government buildings and offices. As a result of the Government's decentralization policy that diffused power to provinces and districts, central Government control over the behavior of provincial, district, and local officials was weakened. Local officials were often unaware of Government policies on topics such as religious tolerance due to the incomplete dissemination and application of existing laws and regulations and, when aware of the laws, often failed to enforce the laws. The LFNC at times visited areas where religious persecution had taken place in order to instruct local officials on Government policy and regulation. More often, however, the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department encouraged local or provincial governments to resolve conflicts on their own and in accordance with Decree 92.

In some areas unauthorized churches have generally been allowed to conduct services without hindrance by local authorities. Within the LEC, some congregations have sought greater independence and have forged their own connections with Protestant groups abroad. Authorities in several provinces insisted that independent church congregations return to the LEC, but in other areas authorities allowed independent churches to conduct services without hindrance.

Methodists have consistently sought to register with the LFNC since the beginning of this decade as a separate denomination. In early 2006, Methodists again requested to register with the Government as a religious group separate and apart from the LEC but received no official response. In early 2006 some village and district officials appeared to be taking a stronger stance against unauthorized Methodist congregations; however, this reportedly tapered off in late 2006.

Between 1999 and 2001 local authorities closed approximately 20 of Vientiane Province's 60 LEC churches. Beginning in 2002, most of these churches were allowed to reopen. However, despite requests, officials in several districts of Savannakhet Province did not allow local congregations to reopen as many as 6 of Savannakhet's approximately 40 churches, and they remained closed at the end of the reporting period. Despite recent requests that a church building in Dong Nong Khun Village, which was confiscated by local officials in 2000, be returned to its congregation, provincial officials stated in early 2007 that the number of Protestants in the village was not sufficient to warrant having a church even though local Protestants claimed more than 100 worshippers in the village.

As many as 200 of the LEC's nearly 400 congregations do not have permanent church structures and conduct worship services in members' homes. Since the 2002 promulgation of Decree 92, officials from the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department have stated that home churches should be replaced with designated church structures whenever possible. At the same time, village and district LFNC offices often refused permission to construct new churches, and home churches remained the only viable place of worship for many LEC congregations. The LEC continued to encounter difficulties registering new congregations and receiving permission to establish new places of worship or repair existing facilities, particularly in Luang Prabang City, Attapeu, Luang Namtha, and Savannakhet provinces. No new LEC churches were permitted during the reporting period.

Baha'i spiritual assemblies in Vientiane and Savannakhet cities practiced freely, but smaller communities in Khammouane and Savannakhet provinces periodically faced restrictions by local authorities, such as limitations on both the nature and extent of some religious activities.

Lao authorities remained suspicious of major supporters, both foreign and domestic, of religious communities other than Buddhism, especially Protestant 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 an American or imperialist "import" into the country. In the past decade, the LEC suffered the brunt of local-level efforts to close churches, arrest church leaders, and force members to renounce their faith. The LEC's rapid growth during the last decade, its contacts with religious groups abroad, the active proselytizing by some of its members, and its relative independence of Government control contributed to the Government's suspicion of the church's activities. Some authorities also interpreted Christian teachings of obedience to God as signifying disloyalty to the Government and ruling party. There was also strong evidence that the Communist Party leadership viewed Christianity as a tool of western countries to undermine the Communist political system. While LEC leadership was primarily Lao, the LEC membership was comprised mostly of ethnic Mon-Khmer tribes and the Hmong, two groups that historically have resisted central Government control, which contributed to the Government's distrust of the LEC.

During the reporting period there were no reports of official interference with or denial of permission to hold religious celebrations in churches, but there were reports that Protestants in some villages were not allowed to hold Christian celebra-

tions in their homes, thus restricting Protestant activities to church buildings only. This was particularly a problem for Protestants who had not been given approval to build church structures in their villages. For example, Protestants in Nakun Village, Bolikhamsai Province, and Xunya Village, Luang Namtha Province, have reportedly been restricted in their ability to hold religious meetings and celebrations in their homes. Protestants in both villages also have not been given approval to build church structures.

Longstanding restrictions on the Catholic Church's operations in the north resulted in the continued existence of only a handful of small congregations in Sayaboury, Bokeo, Luang Namtha, and Vientiane provinces; however, there were signs during the reporting period that the Government was slowly easing its control over the Catholic community in the north. The Government permitted more frequent visits by the Bishop of Luang Prabang to the north to conduct services for the scattered Catholic community there, but it continued to restrict his travel and prevent his residence in Luang Prabang. There were no ordained Catholic priests operating in the north. Several church properties, including a school in Vientiane Municipality, were seized by the Government after 1975 and have not been returned, nor has the Government provided restitution.

The Government prohibited foreigners from proselytizing, although it permitted foreign NGOs with religious affiliations to work in the country. Authorities sometimes seized religious tracts and teaching materials from local Protestants entering the country from abroad and arrested and expelled foreigners attempting to proselytize. In early 2006 two South Koreans were reportedly arrested for proselytizing in Bokeo Province and were expelled.

Although Decree 92 authorized the printing of non-Buddhist religious texts and allowed religious materials to be imported from abroad, it also required permission for such activities from the LFNC. The LFNC did not authorize Christian or Baha'i denominations to print their own religious materials, although both groups have sought permission to do so for several years. Because of these restrictions, some approved Protestant congregations complained of difficulties in obtaining Bibles and other religious materials. The Government has not allowed the Seventh-day Adventists to import Bibles or other religious materials, but the Government did allow the LEC to import a small number of Bibles in early 2007.

During the reporting period, Bibles were confiscated at the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge from those attempting to import materials for existing congregations. However, there were no reports of arrests associated with these confiscations, as had occurred in past years. Several non-Christian groups indicated that they have not been restricted in bringing religious materials into the country.

The Government generally did not interfere with citizens wishing to travel abroad for short-term religious training. In past years, the Government required that Lao citizens exiting the country receive an exit stamp. This requirement was eliminated in early 2007. Even before the exit stamp requirement was eliminated, many persons of all faiths traveled abroad informally for religious training without obtaining advance permission and without informing authorities of the purpose of their travel. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs usually granted exit visas, but on occasion it refused travel permission to persons going abroad for what it regarded as suspect activities.

Identity cards did not specify religion, nor did family "household registers" or passports, two other important forms of identification. On occasion authorities withheld new ID cards or household registers from Protestants because of their religious beliefs or threatened to withhold official documentation unless they renounced their faith. In 2006 district officials in Houaphan Province reportedly accepted several passport applications from Protestants within their district but subsequently refused to send the applications to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for processing.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities continued to arrest and detain persons for their religious activities. Detentions that occurred during the reporting period tended to be longer than in 2005–2006. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were four religious prisoners: three in Vientiane Province and one in Oudomsai Province. There was also one abduction of a man in Luang Namtha Province in January 2007 in which religion may have played a role. Additionally, six ethnic Hmong, five males and one adult female, who had been detained in 2005 as part of a group of 27, apparently remained in detention at the end of the reporting period. While religion was not considered the primary reason for their detentions, it was considered to be one factor involved. Conditions in prisons were reportedly harsh; like other prisoners, religious detainees suffered from inadequate food rations, lack of medical care, and cramped quarters.

From late 2006 through the end of the reporting period, Protestants in Xunya Village of Luang Namtha Province have reportedly been restricted in their right to worship by local officials. Following the death of a local member of the Protestant community in March 2007, local officials reportedly refused the community permission to hold a Christian funeral service. In May 2007 the LFNC reportedly gave permission for Christian weddings and funerals to take place in the village, but Protestants are reportedly not allowed to gather for worship services. In January 2007 several Christian families in Long District of Luang Namtha Province and Xiang Kho District of Houaphan Province were reportedly asked to renounce their Christian beliefs by local and district-level officials or leave their villages.

In March 2007 Protestants in Nakun Village of Bolikhamsai Province were reportedly reeducated and asked to sign statements indicating that they had engaged in proselytizing. The Protestants were reported as saying that they had been pressured by local officials in regard to their Christian beliefs and had been reeducated several times. Also in March, several Protestant families in Nam Deua Village of Bolikhamsai Province were reportedly told to give up their religious beliefs and threatened with expulsion from their village. In May 2007, 7 of the 10 Christian families in Nakun Village were reportedly forced to resettle to another village after refusing to renounce their Protestant beliefs.

In January 2007 Mr. Khamsone Baccam, an ethnic Thai Dam man described as a Protestant leader, was arrested in Oudomsai Province. The Government has been unwilling to acknowledge that he is being held, and multiple requests for information about his status were not answered.

Also in January 2007, Mr. Somphone Khantisouk was abducted from a roadside in Luang Namtha Province, reportedly by local police. While the exact reason for Somphone's abduction is unclear, religion is not considered to be the primary cause. However, some in the religious community have indicated that his perceived religious affiliation may have been one factor involved in his abduction.

Bolikhamsai Province officials indicated in February 2007 that two Buddhist monks had been arrested for being ordained without Government approval and for celebrating inappropriately following the ordination ceremony. The two were reportedly only detained a short time before being released.

In December 2006 five ethnic Yao Protestants were arrested in Luang Namtha Province for constructing a church building without appropriate authorization. The five men were released on January 20, 2007, reportedly after complying with a local official's request that they sign a document renouncing their faith. Since their release, the men have reportedly been closely watched by local officials and have not been allowed to gather for worship services.

In late 2006 several villagers in Luang Namtha Province were reportedly called into a local police station and questioned following a children's performance in the village. Reportedly, local officials incorrectly thought that the performance may have had some relationship to a "foreign religion."

In November 2006 two ethnic Khmu U.S. Legal Permanent Residents who were visiting Khon Khen Village in Vientiane Province were detained after participating in and videotaping a Protestant celebration in the village. The two, a pastor and his wife, were released after 3-weeks' detention and payment of a $9,000 fine.

Thirteen ethnic Khmu Protestants in Khon Khen Village were also arrested in November 2006. According to Government officials, 1 of the 13 was quickly released after it was discovered that he was a local official. Nine of the 12 other Khmu Protestants were released from a police detention facility on May 16. Three pastors, considered the leaders of the group, remained in prison at the end of the reporting period. The Government has not indicated if there are any charges against the three that remain incarcerated.

In August 2006 two LEC members in Saveth Village, Savannakhet Province, were arrested, reportedly for being outspoken about their faith. The two men were held without charges for several months. Eventually, they were charged with "causing division in society" and sentenced to 6 months in prison. The two were released on February 9, 2007.

From June through July 2006, a Protestant man in Nam Heng Village of Oudomsai Province was reportedly jailed for possessing ammunition at his residence. According to the LEC, the man had completed his service in the military and did have a small amount of ammunition at his residence, not unusual in remote villages where people engage in hunting. The Protestant community, however, regarded the ammunition as an excuse for his arrest, believing the real reason was local officials' opposition to his Christianity. The man was released in July following payment of a $200 fine.

In April 2006 district officials in Salavan Province arrested an LEC member, Mr. Adern, who refused the village chief's order to recant his faith. He was reportedly

from one of four Protestant families that had lived in the village, two of which had reportedly been forced to leave by the time of his arrest. During the first 10 days of house arrest he was reportedly bound with wrist and ankle shackles but was then unshackled and allowed to move freely in his home. Mr. Adern was released from house arrest in July 2006.

In 2005 authorities in Bolikhamsai Province detained a group of 27 ethnic Hmong. The group—all but one minors at the time they were initially detained—were residents at the Petchabun displaced-persons' settlement in northern Thailand, and were irregularly deported back to Laos by Thai authorities who considered them illegal immigrants. Some sources indicated that the group members were Christians and may have been detained in Laos in part due to their religious affiliation. Six of the 27 Hmong were apparently still in detention or otherwise unaccounted for at the end of the reporting period. Complicating this case, the Government had refused to acknowledge it was holding the group of 27 for 15 months and, only in March 2007, did it claim it had "found" the 21 girls from the group. The Government released the girls into the custody of extended family members but did not allow the presence of international observers at the release ceremony. Many of the girls have reportedly returned to Thailand. The Government still has not accounted for the five males and one adult female.

In late 2005 an unapproved LEC Church in Houaysay Noi Village, Bokeo Province, was destroyed by local officials, and six church leaders were arrested. One of the six died while in jail, and the other five were released in early 2006.

In 1999, authorities arrested two members of the Lao Evangelical Church in Oudomsai Province, Mr. Nyoht and Mr. Thongchanh, and charged them with treason and sedition, although their arrests appeared to have been for proselytizing. Nyoht was sentenced to 12 years in prison and Thongchanh to 15 years. In October 2006 Nyoht died while in prison. Thongchanh remained in prison at the end of this reporting period despite appeals that his case be reviewed.

Efforts by local officials to force Protestants to renounce their faith continued in some areas. In some cases, officials threatened religious minorities with arrest or expulsion from their villages if they did not comply.

In January 2007 officials in Long District of Luang Namtha Province and Xiang Kho District of Houaphan Province reportedly threatened several Protestant families with expulsion if they did not renounce their beliefs. In March 2007 officials in Nam Deua District of Bolikhamsai Province also reportedly pressured some Protestants to renounce their beliefs.

Lands belonging to several Protestant families in Nam Heng Village of Oudomsai Province were reportedly confiscated by the village chief and redistributed to other villagers in early 2006. Some other Protestants who had previously resettled to the village were said to have returned to their home province of Phongsaly after being pressured by the village chief. According to Lao officials and the LEC, the land confiscation issue was resolved in mid-2006. Local Protestants in the village indicated in early 2007 that, while opposition to Christianity may have complicated the issue, most of those whose lands were confiscated had moved to Nam Heng Village without Government authorization.

In February 2005 authorities expelled Protestant villagers from Ban Kok Pho Village of Bolikhamsai Province after they refused to renounce their faith.

In early 2005 authorities in Muang Phin District of Savannakhet Province detained 24 ethnic Brou Protestants associated with the LEC at the district police office for several days in order to force their renunciation of faith. All but two of the men recanted their faith. These two men were imprisoned for approximately 1 year but were reportedly released in early 2006.

Forced Religious Conversion

Local officials in some areas attempted to force Protestants to renounce their faith; however, there were no reports of explicit forced conversion to another faith during the reporting period. In cases where renunciations occurred, villagers were told by local officials that they would be expelled from their villages if they did not sign documents renouncing their faith. In at least one case, villagers in Nakun Village of Bolikhamsai Province who chose not to renounce their beliefs were reported to have been relocated by local officials. According to Protestants following the incident, village officials had suggested that Protestant villagers convert to Buddhism or to their previously held animist beliefs. The same officials reportedly told villagers that Protestantism is not good because it is an American religion.

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government's record of respect for religious freedom, particularly in regard to Protestant minorities, continued to be marred by problems at the local level, with incidents of persecution occurring in many provinces. However, some positive steps were taken during the reporting period to address specific religious freedom concerns.

In its official pronouncements in recent years, the Government called for conciliation and equality among religious faiths. The LFNC continued to instruct local officials on religious tolerance. Officials from the LFNC traveled with representatives of the LEC to several provinces to promote better understanding between LEC congregations and local officials.

The LEC continued to conduct an active program of public service during this reporting period, providing developmental assistance and organizing social welfare projects in several areas that had previously experienced religious intolerance. In conjunction with the LFNC, the LEC continued to conduct meetings with officials and Protestants in some villages where there had been religious tensions.

On May 6, 2007 the LEC opened a Sports and Vocational Training Center in Vientiane Municipality on a piece of property that had been confiscated by the Government several years earlier. The land was returned to the LEC contingent on the Center being made available for use by Lao athletes to prepare for the 2009 South East Asian Games.

In early 2007 church members in Houaysay Noi Village, Bokeo Province, were given approval to meet in a house church. The village had previously experienced problems, when in late 2005, an unapproved LEC Church in Houaysay Noi Village was destroyed by local officials, and six church leaders were arrested. One of the six died while in jail, and the other five were released in early 2006.

In the past, local officials in some areas obstructed Christian congregations' observance of religious holidays such as Christmas. Church officials indicated that Christmas activities at recognized religious venues in 2006 were less restricted than in 2005, particularly in Vientiane Municipality.

Churches that had previously been closed were allowed to reopen in some provinces in 2006. The Government permitted the reopening of four LEC churches in Bolikhamsai Province that were officially closed in past years, including a church in Khamsan Village that had been closed since 2003. Officials in Muang Feuang District of Vientiane Province granted permission for LEC members to reconstruct a destroyed church in Phone Ngam Village in late 2005, and the church has since reopened. During the reporting period, there were no reported LEC church closures.

In contrast to the past policy of denying all such requests, several provinces also permitted some Christian congregations to expand or renovate long-standing churches. In 2006 Catholics were permitted to construct two rural churches in Vientiane Province. Catholic communities had existed in both villages for more than 10 years.

In June 2006 authorities permitted the Catholic Church to conduct an ordination in Vientiane Municipality along with the ordination of a deacon in Champassak Province. This marked the first Catholic ordinations in the country since 1975. The ordination in Vientiane Municipality was initially scheduled to take place in late 2005 in Bolikhamsai Province; however, the Government blocked it. In December 2006 the Government allowed the ordination of three additional Catholic priests in Vientiane Municipality. Approval for the ordinations represented improvements over past restrictions.

The small Seventh-day Adventist Church, confined to a handful of congregations in Vientiane Municipality and Bolikhamsai, Bokeo, Champassak, Luang Prabang, and Xiengkhoug provinces, reported no significant Government interference in its activities in recent years, and its members appeared to be free to practice their faith.

In late 2006 the Baha'is were able, with assistance from the Lao Front for National Construction, to reclaim two pieces of property in Vientiane and Khammouane provinces that had been seized by the Government in 1975. In 2006 the Government officially approved land for the establishment of four new Baha'i centers, two in Vientiane Municipality, one in Vientiane Province, and one in Savannakhet Province. While the land approval has been granted, the Baha'i have not yet received all required paperwork from the District Land Offices and have not yet requested approval to begin construction of the new centers. Additionally, in June 2006 the Government gave official approval for Baha'is to use land where they already have a cemetery.

Baha'i local spiritual assemblies and the National Spiritual Assembly routinely held Baha'i 19-day feasts and celebrated all holy days. The Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly in Vientiane met regularly and has sent delegations to the Universal

House of Justice in Mount Carmel, in Haifa, Israel. Visitors from sister congregations in Malaysia have visited the Baha'i Center in Vientiane.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

For the most part, the various religious communities coexist amicably. Society places importance on harmonious relations, and the dominant Buddhist faith generally is tolerant of other religious practices. There has been no ecumenical movement to date. Local cultural mores generally instilled 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 based abroad led to some tensions within the Protestant community. Frictions also have arisen over the refusal of some members of minority religious groups, particularly Protestants, to participate in Buddhist or animist religious ceremonies.

In December 2005 an LEC pastor, Mr. Aroun Varaphong, was killed in Bolikhamsai Province after preaching at a pre-Christmas service. There is no evidence that a serious investigation into his killing was ever conducted.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Religious freedom is a key component of the Embassy's Mission Strategic Plan. The U.S. Ambassador and Embassy staff maintained the promotion of religious freedom as a priority during the reporting period. The Ambassador regularly raised the issue of religious freedom in calls on LFNC and Foreign Ministry officials. The Ambassador also spoke directly about religious freedom with governors in visits to the provinces. Other Embassy officers regularly discussed religious freedom with a range of central, provincial, district, and local officials.

The Embassy maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Department of Religious Affairs in the LFNC. The Embassy informed the LFNC of specific cases of arrest or harassment. The LFNC in turn used this information to intercede with local officials. Embassy representatives met with religious leaders throughout 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.

The Embassy actively encouraged high-level visits as the most effective tool for eliciting greater respect for religious freedom from the Government. The Embassy also regularly posted on its Web site material relevant to religious freedom in the country. In January 2007 the former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom visited the country and met with the LFNC and the Deputy Prime Minister, as well as the Governors of Bolikhamsai and Savannakhet provinces, to encourage greater religious freedom, registration of the Methodists as a recognized religious group, the release of religious prisoners in several provinces, and the return of a confiscated church to its congregation. Both the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs also visited the country during the reporting period and encouraged greater religious freedom during their meetings with senior Government officials.

MALAYSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places some restrictions on this right. Islam is recognized in the Constitution as "the religion of the Federation," but the practice of non-Sunni Islamic beliefs was significantly restricted, and those deviating from accepted Sunni beliefs could be subjected to "rehabilitation." Non-Muslims were free to practice their religious beliefs with few restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. The Government provides financial support to an Islamic religious establishment and provides more limited funds to non-Islamic religious communities. State authorities impose Islamic religious laws administered through Islamic courts on all ethnic Malays (and other Muslims) in family law and other civil matters. The Government restricts distribution of Malay-language Christian materials in Peninsular Malaysia and forbids the proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims. Muslims may generally not convert to another religion.

Over the past several years, the country's civil court system has gradually ceded jurisdictional control to Shari'a courts in limited areas of family law involving disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Pursuant to Shari'a family laws in force throughout the country, non-Muslims must convert to Islam upon marrying a Muslim. In several cases during the reporting period, state religious authorities detained and attempted to religiously "rehabilitate" Muslim spouses who attempted to renounce Islam, or who married non-Muslims in churches or temples. Such marriages were not recognized by Muslim religious authorities. Children resulting from these unions were sometimes removed by Islamic religious authorities from parental custody, pending religious "rehabilitation" of the detained Muslim parent. Several leading lawyers and human rights advocates spoke out against these practices, and several related court cases remained under review at the Federal Court (the country's highest court).

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 127,000 square miles and a population of 26.6 million. According to 2000 census figures, approximately 60 percent of the population practiced Islam; 19 percent Buddhism; 9 percent Christianity; 6 percent Hinduism; and 3 percent Confucianism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions. The remainder was accounted for by other faiths, including animism, Sikhism, and the Baha'i Faith. Ethnic Malay Muslims account for approximately 55 percent of the population. Longstanding Government policies provide material economic and educational preferences to the country's majority population of ethnic Malays, all of whom are legally categorized as Muslims at birth. Political parties are largely organized along ethnic and religious lines. An unknown number of foreign missionaries of various faiths operate in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government placed some restrictions on this right. The Government provides financial support to an Islamic religious establishment composed of a variety of governmental, quasi-governmental, and other institutions, and it indirectly provides more limited funds to non-Islamic communities. State governments impose Islamic religious law on Muslims in some cultural and social matters but generally do not interfere with the religious practices of non-Muslim communities. Prime Minister Abdullah developed the concept of "Islam Hadhari" (literally "civilizational Islam"), which he described as an "approach" that reminds Muslims "that Islam in reality is a religion which is tolerant, progressive and peace-loving," and is intended to foster interreligious tolerance and moderation in a multiethnic and multireligious society. The Government promoted the 10 tenets of "Islam Hadhari" in schools by including it in the federally mandated curriculum, through religious lectures in the civil service, through dialogues and forums, and through the electronic and print media.

Although article 11 of the Federal Constitution guarantees religious freedom, the country's highest court ruled during the reporting period that Muslims wanting to convert to another religion must first obtain approval from a Shari'a court. The court's decision effectively precludes the conversion of Muslims, since the Shari'a courts have granted only a handful of requests to convert to another religion in recent years.

Shari'a laws are administered by state authorities through Islamic courts and bind all Muslims, most of whom are ethnic Malays. Shari'a laws and the degree of their enforcement varied from state to state. Shari'a courts do not give equal weight to the testimony of women. Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to advancement of women's rights complained that women did not receive fair treatment from Shari'a courts in matters of divorce and child custody. In December 2005 Parliament passed the Islamic Family Law Act (IFLA) in an effort to harmonize Shari'a laws throughout the country. The IFLA would have weakened a Muslim wife's ability to control her private property during marriage, as well as enhanced the ability of Muslim men to divorce, take multiple wives, and claim an existing wife's property upon taking a new wife. Following protests from women's rights advocates about these and other provisions of the IFLA, the attorney general commenced a review of the law. As of June 30, 2007, the law had not been gazetted; the attorney general's chamber continued to review proposed amendments to the IFLA.

The Registrar of Societies, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, determines whether a religious organization may be registered and thereby qualify for Government grants and other benefits. The Government refused to recognize various religious organizations, and in order to operate legally, these groups sometimes registered themselves under the Companies Act. In one prominent example, the Government alleged that the Rufaqa Corporation, established in 1997 and recognized by the country's Registrar of Companies, was a deviant religious group trying to revive the teachings of the banned Al-Arqam movement. Although several state governments have declared the Rufaqa Corporation to be a deviant religious group and have confiscated religious materials and removed portraits of the Al Arqam founder Ustaz Ashaari from their business premises, the authorities have not stopped their businesses from operating.

The law allows the state to demolish unregistered religious statues and houses of worship. Several NGOs complained about the demolition of unregistered Hindu temples and shrines located on state and local lands. These structures were often constructed on privately owned plantations prior to the country's' independence in 1957. Around that time, plantation lands containing many Hindu shrines and temples were transferred to Government ownership.

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.

State governments have authority over the building of non-Muslim places of worship and the allocation of land for non-Muslim cemeteries.

The Government restricts the distribution in peninsular Malaysia of Malay-language translations of the Bible, Christian tapes, and other printed materials. In April 2005 the Prime Minister declared that copies of the Malay-language Bible must have the words "Not for Muslims" printed on the front and could be distributed only in churches and Christian bookshops. The distribution of Malay-language Christian materials face few restrictions in East Malaysia.

The Government prohibits publications and public debates that it alleges might incite racial or religious disharmony. In 2006 the Government banned at least 18 books with religious themes, including *The Battle for God*, by Karen Armstrong. Two previous books by Armstrong, *A History of God* and *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, were banned in 2005.

The Government continued to require all Muslim civil servants to attend Government-approved religion classes

Public schools generally offered Islamic religious instruction, which is compulsory for Muslim children. Non-Muslim students are required to take nonreligious morals/ethics courses. Private schools are free to offer a non-Islamic religious curriculum as an option for non-Muslims. There are no restrictions on home instruction. The Government offered grants only to privately run Muslim religious schools that agreed to allow Government supervision and adopted a Government-approved curriculum. At primary and secondary public schools, student assemblies frequently commence with recitation of a Muslim prayer by a teacher or school leader.

Government-controlled bodies exerted pressure upon non-Muslim women to wear headscarves while attending official functions. In December 2006 the Kelantan Government enacted a law against "indecent dressing" by Muslim women working in retail outlets and restaurants. The dress code requires headscarves and allows only faces and hands to be exposed. The law also stipulates that non-Muslim women should avoid dressing "sexily or indecently." Women who violate the dress code can be fined up to $146 (500 ringgit). Women's rights leaders and the Minister of Women, Family, and Community Development criticized the new law as overly restrictive.

The PAS-led state government in Kelantan continued its ban on traditional Malay dance theaters, prohibited advertisements depicting women not fully covered by clothing, enforced wearing of headscarves by Muslim women, and imposed fines for violators during the reporting period. However, state authorities reversed several previously enacted Islamic law-related prohibitions and allowed operation of gender-segregated cinemas and concert venues, fashion shows limited to female attendees, and billiard/snooker centers for men only.

Proselytizing of Muslims by members of other religious groups is strictly prohibited, although proselytizing of non-Muslims faces no similar obstacles.

Several holy days are recognized as official holidays, including Hari Raya Puasa (Muslim), Hari Raya Qurban (Muslim), the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad (Muslim), Wesak Day (Buddhist), Deepavali (Hindu), Christmas (Christian), and, in East Malaysia, Good Friday (Christian).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In practice Muslims are not permitted to convert to another religion. In several rulings during the reporting period, secular courts ceded jurisdiction to Shari'a courts in matters involving conversion to or from Islam, and in family law cases involving Muslims versus non-Muslims. Some of these cases remained under appeal at the Federal Court.

On May 30, 2007, the Federal Court ruled that Muslim individuals must obtain an order from the Shari'a Court stating that they have become an "apostate" (they have renounced Islam) before they can change their national identity card. As apostasy grants (grants of permission to convert to another religion) by the Shari'a court are extremely rare, the court's decision effectively precludes any legal right of Muslims to convert to another religion. The 2007 ruling was in response to an appeal in a 2005 case in which the country's second-highest court, the Court of Appeal, denied the request of Lina Joy, a Muslim who had converted to Christianity, to change the religion designated on her national identity card. The Court of Appeal had ruled that a Shari'a court must first approve a request by a Muslim citizen to convert to another religion. Because the designated religion on Lina's national identity card would remain "Islam," and because the Civil Marriage Provision of the 1976 Law Reform Act prohibits Muslims from solemnizing a marriage under civil law, Lina will not be legally allowed to marry her Catholic fiancée. Citing the case as "a matter of general public interest," the Federal Court (the country's highest court) had agreed to hear Lina's appeal and address the degree to which Shari'a courts have jurisdiction over determinations of Muslim apostasy.

By the end of the reporting period a decision has still not been reached in the appeal of a case involving the disposition of the remains of a Hindu man who was alleged to have converted to Islam before his death. The man's Hindu wife, claimed that there was no clear evidence that he had converted to Islam and struggled with Islamic authorities over which religion's rites should govern his burial. The wife was appealing a secular High Court ruling that it had no jurisdiction to hear the case because it involved a Muslim, despite her being non-Muslim. A Shari'a court had earlier ruled that the Hindu man was a Muslim and Islamic authorities buried the man according to Muslim rites

On March 13, the Court of Appeal upheld a High Court ruling that would allow a Muslim convert to initiate divorce proceedings in a Shari'a court, obtain custody of under-aged children from a non-Muslim spouse, and unilaterally convert the children to Islam. Following condemnation of the secular courts' rulings by non-Muslim religious leaders and the Bar Council, the Court of Appeal agreed to stay execution of its ruling until the non-Muslim spouse exhausts her appeal process before the Federal Court. That process continued as of June 30, 2007.

Other child custody cases arose during the reporting period that reflect the turbulent jurisdictional interface between the Shari'a and secular courts on family law matters pitting Muslims versus non-Muslims. One such case involved 29-year-old Revathi Masoosai who was raised as a Hindu by her grandmother, although she was born to Muslim parents and registered at birth as a Muslim. Revathi filed a statutory declaration in 2001 that identified herself as a Hindu. After she married a Hindu man in 2004, worshipped as a Hindu, and gave birth in December 2005, the Malacca Islamic Religious Department (MAIM) accused Revathi of deviating from Islam and demanded custody of her newborn daughter. Revathi refused. On January 8, 2007, Revathi was taken into custody under a Shari'a court order. Despite the objections of Revathi and her husband, MAIM placed the couple's daughter in the care of Revathi's Muslim mother. Revathi's initial 100 days of "rehabilitation" detention was extended on April 18, 2007, for an additional 80 days, reportedly due to her refusal to cooperate with Muslim religious authorities while in detention. Her husband filed a habeas corpus application in the High Court on May 14, in an effort to secure Revathi's release. He claimed the religious rehabilitation center in which she was held had not been gazetted as a detention center. As of June 30, 2007, Revathi remained in detention, and the High Court had not heard her husband's habeas corpus application.

On April 28, 2007, officers from the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department (JAIS) raided the home of a Muslim woman and Hindu man who were married in July 2006 in a Hindu temple. According to the husband's police report and petition filed in the High Court, JAIS officials told the couple that their Hindu marriage was deemed void. JAIS stated it removed the woman from the couple's home on suspicion that she committed "khalwat" (i.e., being in close physical proximity to a man other than her husband). She remained in detention and was undergoing religious "rehabilitation" at the end of the reporting period. The husband's lawsuit remained pending.

While practices vary from state to state, both the Government and the opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) have attempted to use mosques in the states they control to deliver politically oriented messages. In recent years several states controlled by the Barisan Nasional (BN, the governing coalition) banned opposition-affiliated imams from speaking at mosques, vigorously enforced existing restrictions on the content of sermons, replaced mosque leaders and governing committees thought to be sympathetic to the opposition, and threatened to close down unauthorized mosques with ties to the opposition. Similarly, the state government of Kelantan, controlled by PAS, reportedly restricted imams affiliated with BN parties from speaking in mosques.

The Government opposed what it considered "deviant" interpretations of Islam, maintaining that allegedly deviant groups' views endanger national security. According to the Government's Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) Web site, 56 deviant teachings had been identified and prohibited to Muslims as of June 30, 2007. They included Shi'a, transcendental meditation, and Baha'i teachings, among others. The Government asserted that "deviationist" teachings could cause divisions among Muslims. JAKIM established written guidelines concerning what constitutes "deviationist" behavior or belief. State religious authorities, in making their determinations on these matters, generally followed the Federal guidelines. Members of groups deemed "deviationist" may be arrested and detained, with the consent of a Shari'a court, in order to be "rehabilitated" and returned to the "true path of Islam." In June 2005 the Religious Affairs Minister told parliament that 22 "deviant" religious groups with an estimated 2,820 followers had been identified in the country. He stated that members of these groups were subject to prosecution, detention under the Internal Security Act, or "rehabilitation." Neither the Government nor religious authorities provided data on the number of such persons subjected to prosecution or "rehabilitation."

The Government continued to monitor the activities of the small Shi'a minority. According to the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Taoists (MCCBCHST), the Government restricted visas for foreign clergy under the age of 40 as a means of preventing "militant clergy" from entering the country. While representatives of non-Muslim groups did not sit on the immigration committee that approved visa requests, the MCCBCHST was asked for its recommendations.

Article 11, an NGO named after the freedom of religion clause in the Constitution, organized four public forums to discuss the perceived erosion of constitutional protection of non Muslims' religious freedom. The last three events sponsored were either canceled or shortened at the request of police, following the actual or threatened appearance of a large number of Muslim protesters. As debate over religious topics intensified, in July and August 2006 the Prime Minister warned both mainstream and Internet-based media to refrain from publicizing debates about contentious religious topics. He also directed all NGOs—both Muslim and non-Muslim—to cease public statements and activities that could generate further religious controversy. Article 11 held no further public discussions during the reporting period. On April 23, 2007, a minister in the Prime Minister's department announced the establishment of a National Unity Advisory Panel (NUAP), consisting of representatives from the country's major religions. The NUAP reportedly convened several times in the months prior to the Minister's announcement. Religious leaders reportedly used the NUAP to confidentially voice their concerns to the Prime Minister about controversial religious freedom matters in the country.

Approvals for building permits sometimes were granted very slowly. Minority religious groups reported that state governments sometimes used restrictive zoning and construction codes to block construction of non-Muslim places of worship.

As of the end of the reporting period, a case regarding the pending demolition of an unregistered 150-year-old temple Negeri Sembilan remained open. In May 2006 the temple sought a court injunction against the demolition after state officials announced their intention to do so. The temple sits on state-owned land that had been zoned for road construction. Approximately 300 worshippers regularly use the temple

In July 2006, following an 11-year dispute, a high court judge prevented a developer in Pahang state from destroying a Hindu temple on land purchased by the developer. The judge ruled that the temple existed on the land prior to the purchase and had the right to coexist on the land. The developer filed no appeal against the ruling, and the temple remained standing at the end of the reporting period.

Since the defeat of the PAS in Terengganu in March 2004 elections, state and local officials in that state have significantly reduced enforcement of dress codes for women.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to the Government, no individuals were detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for religious reasons during the period covered by this report.

The Government is concerned that "deviationist" teachings could cause divisions among Muslims. Members of "deviationist" groups can be arrested and detained, with the consent of a Shari'a court, to be "rehabilitated" and returned to the "true path of Islam." As of June 30, 2007, religious authorities sought Ayah Pin, the leader of a nonviolent religious group in Terengganu known as the Sky Kingdom, and one of his four wives for supporting "deviant" religious practices. In 2005, at the instruction of state officials, police arrested approximately 70 Sky Kingdom members and destroyed all nonresidential buildings on the group's compound. One of the 70 arrested agreed to undergo religious rehabilitation; the cases against the other Ayah Pin followers were pending at the end of the reporting period. In July 2004 the Federal Court dismissed an appeal by four followers of Ayah Pin seeking a statutory declaration that Sky Kingdom followers have the right to practice the religion of their choice. The Federal Court held that their attempt to renounce Islam did not free them from the jurisdiction of the state Shari'a court.

On November 14, 2006, JAIS detained 107 persons, including several children, during a raid in Kuala Lumpur against suspected followers of the banned al Arqam Islamic group. While all detainees were subsequently released, JAIS stated it intended to press charges in a Shari'a court against six of the arrested individuals. The Government banned al Arqam in 1994, labeling it a "deviant" sect. Ashaari Muhammad, the leader of its approximately 10,000 followers, subsequently spent 10 years under house arrest. Ashaari established a holding company, Rufaqa Corporation, to manage his business interests while detained. Rufaqa Corporation came under investigation for allegedly supporting the revival of the al Arqam group. On March 1, 2007 JAIS raided the homes of 28 individuals with links to Rufaqa Corporation to gather further evidence against the company. JAIS also raided several business premises of Rufaqa Corporation on March 2, 2007, tearing down posters and signs bearing the word "Rufaqa" and seizing books and other materials featuring Ashaari.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

On February 22, 2007, the Prime Minister publicly criticized efforts by the Islamic religious departments of several states to establish "snoop squads" to police the private behavior of Muslims. The Prime Minister stated that such activities violated citizens' right to privacy. He stated that each state's Islamic religious authorities should instead focus on programs to strengthen the Islamic values and morals of the community. Following the Prime Minister's comments, no state's Islamic religious authorities established or continued formal programs to investigate the private morality of Muslims. However, state religious authorities continued to police the public behavior of Muslims; public actions deemed immoral (e.g. close physical contact by unmarried Muslim individuals, or "khalwat"), remained punishable by fines and religious "rehabilitation."

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were a few reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The Government sometimes intervened to suppress discussions of controversial religious disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims.

On November 5, 2006, police reacted quickly and forcefully to protect worshippers at a Catholic church in Ipoh, when more than 1,000 Muslims gathered to protest the rumored baptism of several hundred Muslim children. The rumor was false, and the country's top police officer, the Inspector General Police, subsequently declared that those responsible for initiating the rumor were a threat to public order and national security. The Prime Minister declared that the parties responsible for starting the rumor should be severely punished. On November 20, 2006 police detained a married couple from Ipoh on suspicion of starting the rumor. They subsequently released the couple on bail, and the Government's investigation into the incident continued as of June 30, 2007.

In August 2006 a leaflet was widely distributed that contained a death threat against a prominent Muslim human rights lawyer who had played a leading role in organizing Article 11 discussions. He had publicly warned against the encroach-

ment of Shari'a courts upon the jurisdiction of the civil court system. Non-Malay political and religious leaders from across the religious spectrum publicly criticized the leaflet. Several NGO leaders and opposition party politicians noted that Government criticism of the death threat was muted, as no cabinet-level minister publicly condemned it. As of June 30, 2007, the police continued their investigation of the death threat, although no arrests have been made.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Embassy representatives maintained an active dialogue with leaders and representatives of various religious groups, including those not officially recognized by the Government. The Embassy coordinated funding for a Fulbright scholar who addressed interfaith concerns while in residence as a lecturer at a public university. The Embassy sponsored visits by American Islamic scholars; it also funded civil society grants and exchange grants for representatives of NGOs working to promote greater religious tolerance, respect for diversity, and human rights and openness in the country.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

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

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago with an area of approximately 70 square miles and a population of 61,800. Major religious groups include the United Church of Christ (formerly Congregational), with 54.8 percent of the population; the Assemblies of God, 25.8 percent; and the Roman Catholic Church, 8.4 percent. Also represented are Bukot Non Jesus (also known as Assembly of God Part Two), 2.8 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 2.1 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 0.9 percent; Full Gospel, 0.7 percent; and the Baha'i Faith, 0.6 percent. Persons without any religious affiliation account for 1.5 percent of the population. Islam and the Jehovah's Witnesses were each believed to have a few hundred practitioners.

Foreign missionaries are present and operate freely. Religious schools are operated by the Roman Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bukot Non Jesus, and the Baptist Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full, and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Good Friday, Gospel Day, and Christmas are official religious holidays. These holidays do not negatively affect any religious groups.

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

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 an interdenominational 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Christianity is the dominant social and cultural force. Governmental and social functions typically begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister, cleric, or church official.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

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

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 260 square miles and population of 107,900. The country consists of 607 islands spread over a 2,000-mile long swath of ocean; diverse languages and cultures exist within each of the country's four states. Several Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, are present in every state. Most Protestant groups trace their roots to American Congregationalist missionaries. On the island of Kosrae, the population is approximately 7,800; 95 percent are Protestants. On Pohnpei, the population of 35,000 is evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics. On Chuuk and Yap, an estimated 60 percent are Catholic and 40 percent are Protestant. Religious groups with small followings include Baptists, Assemblies of God, Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Baha'i Faith. There is a small group of Buddhists on Pohnpei. Attendance at religious services is generally high; churches are well supported by their congregations and play a significant role in civil society.

Most immigrants are Filipino Catholics who have joined local Catholic churches. The Filipino Iglesia Ni Cristo also has a church in Pohnpei.

In the 1890s, on the island of Pohnpei, intermissionary conflicts and the conversion of clan leaders resulted in religious divisions along clan lines which persist today. More Protestants live on the western side of the island, while more Catholics live on the eastern side.

Missionaries of many religious traditions are present and operate freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government provides a few grants to private, church-affiliated schools. Public schools do not provide religious instruction.

Christmas and Good Friday are national religious days.

There are numerous church-sponsored schools, and religious groups operate radio stations that broadcast religious programming on Pohnpei, Yap, and Chuuk.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Protestant churches have formed an Inter-Denominational Council to address social problems.

SECTION IV. U.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 regularly meet with the leaders of religious communities. The Embassy also worked closely with church-related nongovernmental organizations in its efforts to promote good governance and religious tolerance.

MONGOLIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, the law limits proselytizing, and some religious groups faced bureaucratic harassment or were denied registration.

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

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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. Government urged the Government to investigate and correct the difficulties some religious organizations experience in registering.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 604,247 square miles and a population of 2.6 million. Buddhism and the country's traditions are closely tied, and almost all ethnic Mongolians (93 percent of the population) practice some form of Buddhism. Lamaist Buddhism of the Tibetan variety is the traditional and dominant religion.

When socialist controls on religion and on the country's traditions ended in 1990, interest in the practice of Buddhism grew. The Buddhist community is not homogeneous, and there are several competing schools.

Kazakhs, most of whom are Muslim, are the largest ethnic minority, constituting approximately 4 percent of the population nationwide and 85 percent in the western province, Bayan-Olgiy. Kazakhs operate Islamic schools for their children. They sometimes receive financial assistance from religious organizations in Kazakhstan and Turkey.

There is a small number of Christians, including Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, and Protestants. In the capital, Ulaanbaatar, approximately 30,000 citizens, or 3 percent of the registered population of the city, practice Christianity.

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

Missionaries are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, the law limits proselytizing, and some religious groups seeking registration face burdensome bureaucratic requirements and lengthy delays. The Constitution explicitly recognizes the separation of church and state.

Although there is no state religion, ethnic Mongolian traditionalists believe that Buddhism is the "natural religion" of the country. The Government contributed to the restoration of several Buddhist sites that are important religious, historical, and cultural centers. The Government did not otherwise subsidize Buddhist or any other religious groups.

A religious group must register with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs, a decentralized and bureaucratic process, in order to legally function as an organization. Religious institutions must reregister annually. The law allows the Government to supervise and limit the number of places of worship and number of clergy. The Government used the registration process as a mechanism to limit the number of places for religious worship; however, there were no reports that it limited the number of clergy during the reporting period.

Groups must provide the following documentation when registering: a letter to the national ministry requesting registration, a letter from the city council or other local authority granting approval to conduct religious services, a brief description of the organization, its charter, documentation of the founding of the local group, a list of leaders or officers, brief biographic information on the person wishing to conduct religious services, and the expected number of worshippers. The Ulaanbaatar City Council and other local legislative bodies require similar documentation prior to granting approval to conduct religious services. While the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs possesses the ultimate authority to approve an organization's application, this appears to be largely pro forma. In practice local legislative bodies assess the applications.

The registration process is decentralized with several layers of bureaucracy and, under the best of circumstances, can take months to complete. Registration with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs in the capital may not be sufficient if a group intends to work in the countryside where local registration is also necessary. Throughout the country, there were 391 registered places of worship, including 217 Buddhist, 143 Christian, 5 Baha'i, 24 Muslim, and 2 shamanistic. During the period covered by this report, the Ministry registered 16 new Christian churches, 11 Buddhist temples, 19 Moslem mosques and 2 shaman temples. In Ulaanbaatar, the registration of one Buddhist and three Christian religious organizations which own a temple and three churches, respectively, remained under consideration.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While the law does not prohibit proselytizing by registered religious groups, it limits such activity by forbidding spreading religious views to nonbelievers by "force, pressure, material incentives, deception, or means which harm health or morals or are psychologically damaging." There were no instances of prosecutions under this law during the reporting period. A Ministry of Education directive bans mixing foreign language or other training with religious teaching or instruction. Monitoring of the ban, particularly in the capital area, is strict. There were no reported violations of the ban in recent years. Religious groups that violate the law may not receive an extension of their registration. If individuals violate the law, the Government may ask their employers to terminate their employment. No such cases were reported during the reporting period. Registration and reregistration are burdensome for all religious groups. The length and documentation requirements of the process discourage some organizations from applying. Some Christian groups stated that local officials believed there were "too many" churches, or that there should at least be parity in the registration of new Buddhist temples and new Christian churches. No churches were known to have been refused registration in Ulaanbaatar during the reporting period; the applications of four religious organizations remained under consideration.

Authorities in Tuv aimag (province), near Ulaanbaatar, routinely denied registration to churches. There are currently no churches registered in the aimag, and several churches were again denied registration during the reporting period. A nongovernmental organization (NGO) filed a formal complaint with the National Human Rights Commission in May 2007 concerning the refusal by Tuv aimag authorities to register Christian churches. In June 2007 the Commission wrote to the Tuv aimag legislative body stating that the body's actions were in violation of the Constitution. Until the past year, almost all mosques throughout the country were registered as branches of one central Islamic organization. However, during the reporting period the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs clarified that each mosque needed to seek additional approvals from local authorities in their areas. This separate registration generally proceeded smoothly. However, one mosque in Darkhan-Uul aimag was told that the aimag legislature had approved its application, but it

did not receive documentation, leaving it unable to register with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs.

Unregistered religious institutions are often able to function in practice but potentially face difficulties with authorities and are unable to sponsor foreign clergy for visas. Visa problems especially affect Christian churches, many of which depend on foreign clergy.

The Muslim community in Ulaanbaatar reported that authorities were helpful in assisting its efforts to construct a mosque, including donating a piece of land for the site.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice in the period covered by this report. Citizens generally were tolerant of the beliefs of others; however, because in the past humanitarian assistance was accompanied by proselytizing activity, there was some friction between foreign Christian missionary groups and citizens. Some social conservatives have criticized foreign influences on youth and children, including foreign religions and the alleged use of material incentives to attract converts.

SECTION IV. U.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 discussed with authorities registration difficulties encountered by Christian groups. These discussions focused attention on U.S. Government concern for religious freedom and resulted in clarification of the requirements for registration. Embassy officials also continued to discuss registration requirements with local faith-based NGOs and urged the National Human Rights Commission to investigate and correct registration problems.

The Embassy maintains contact with the local offices of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and the U.N. Development Program to discuss religious freedom and other human rights issues.

NAURU

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

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government improved during the period covered by this report. The Government lifted some restrictions on the practice of religious and missionary work by the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose missionaries had previously been denied entry visas. There were indications that representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), also previously barred, may also be issued visas.

There were no indications of widespread societal discrimination against particular religious denominations; however, some elements of the Nauru Protestant and Roman Catholic communities occasionally voice discomfort with religious groups perceived as foreign, in particular the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials raised the issue of visa denial for religious leaders with Government officials in Nauru in February 2007.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 8 square miles and a population of 9,200. Christianity is the primary religion. According to the 2002 census, approximately two-thirds of Christians are Protestant, and the remainder are Catholic. The ethnic Chinese on the island, approximately 3 to 4 percent of the population, may be Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, or nonreligious. The largely Christian communities of Tuvaluan and I-Kiribati expatriates were repatriated in late 2006

following the near cessation of phosphate mining in the country. The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons said they had small numbers of followers among the native population.

Foreign missionaries introduced Christianity in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. There are a few active Christian missionary organizations, including representatives of Anglicanism, Methodism, and Catholicism.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion.

Officials of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons have been informed that, under the provisions of the Birth, Death, and Marriage Ordinance, their churches must register with the Government to operate in an official capacity, which includes proselytizing, building churches, holding religious services, and otherwise practicing their religion. Only the Catholic Church and two long-standing Protestant denominations, the Nauru Congregational Church and the Kiribati Protestant Church, are officially registered to operate. The Kiribati Protestant Church catered mainly to the I-Kiribati population on Nauru, much of which has been repatriated. A third, small, breakaway Protestant congregation, catering principally to expatriate workers, is not registered. 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 Mormons reported that it submitted a registration request in 1999; however, the Government has not responded either to the original request or to follow-up inquiries. Officials of Jehovah's Witnesses have not submitted a request for registration.

Christmas and Easter are official religious holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

From 2000 until mid-2007, Foreign Ministers and missionaries from the Jehovah's Witnesses were not permitted to enter the country. Mormon officials were similarly refused entry. Although local adherents could practice their religious beliefs privately, they were discouraged from any form of proselytism among native-born citizens. As a justification for such restrictions, the Government cited concerns that outside churches might break up families through their proselytizing activities.

In the first half of 2007, a foreign representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses was issued a visa to visit the country and meet with local coreligionists. Representatives of the Mormons said they would also apply to visit for religious purposes.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of general societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses who visited the country said they experienced no social hostility. However, economic problems resulting from sharply declining income from the country's phosphate mining industry have led to social strains, and some elements of the Nauru Protestant and Roman Catholic communities occasionally voice discomfort with religious groups perceived as foreign, in particular the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

NEW ZEALAND

The law 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The publicly funded Human Rights Commission made substantial progress in developing a National Statement on Religious Diversity, which reinforces Government policy.

There were isolated instances of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with an area of 103,000 square miles and a population of 4,180,000. The country is predominantly Christian but is becoming more religiously diverse. According to the 2006 census, approximately 56 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christian, a 5 percent decrease from the 2001 census. The number of people who identified themselves as Anglican and Presbyterian declined between 2001 and 2006, while Roman Catholics and the Methodists showed modest and slight increases, respectively. The Maori Christian churches, which integrate Christian tenets with precolonial Maori beliefs and include Ratana and Ringatu, experienced significant growth. The number of self-identified Pentecostals increased by 17.8 percent between 2001 and 2006, while the number affiliating with "Evangelical, Born Again, and Fundamentalist" Christian groups increased by 25.6 percent. During the same period, non-Christian religions continued to show strong growth rates, driven primarily by immigration.

According to 2006 census data, percentages of religious affiliation are: Anglican, 14.8 percent; Roman Catholic, 13.6 percent; Presbyterian, 10.7 percent; other Christian, 8.2 percent; Christian (no specific identification), 5 percent; Methodist, 3.3 percent; Buddhist, 1.7 percent; Hindu, 1.7 percent; and Muslim, 1 percent. There were also more than 90 religious groups that together constituted less than 1 percent of the population. In addition, 34.7 percent stated that they had no religious affiliation.

The indigenous Maori (estimated at 15 percent of the population) tend to be followers of Presbyterianism, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or Maori Christian groups such as Ratana and Ringatu. The Auckland statistical area, which accounts for approximately 30 percent of the country's population, exhibited the greatest religious diversity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

During the reporting period, the Human Rights Commission consulted with religious and other societal leaders to draft a National Statement on Religious Diversity. The current statement, presented in February to the fourth National Interfaith forum in Hamilton, reinforces the existing legal and policy framework that guarantees equal treatment of all faiths before the state, the right to safety for religious individuals and communities, freedom of religious expression, the right to recognition and reasonable accommodation for religious groups, and the promotion of understanding in education. The National Statement is the outcome of a proposal made by the New Zealand delegation to the first meeting of the Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in December 2004. In May 2007 New Zealand hosted the third meeting of the Asia Pacific Interfaith Dialogue in Waitangi, New Zealand. At the meeting Prime Minister Helen Clark expressed her support for the National Statement on Religious Diversity.

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 individual school boards. The Ministry does not keep centralized data on how many schools permit religious instruction or observances; however, the curriculum division stated that religious instruction, if provided at a school, usually was scheduled after normal school hours.

Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act of 1975, the Government, in response to its burgeoning general primary school role and to 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 also enrolled nonpreference students (students who did not fit within the "unique character" of the school; for example, non-Catholic students who attended a Catholic school). A total of 327 of the 2,598 schools of all levels were integrated schools with this designation. As of July 2006 there were 239 Catholic schools, 75 schools with other religious affiliation, and 13 schools with no religious affiliation integrated into the public school system. A student cannot be required to attend an integrated school; admission to such a school is based on a student's request.

For the year ended June 30, 2006, the Human Rights Commission received 2,058 complaints having an element of unlawful discrimination under the Human Rights Act. Of these complaints, 70 (3.4 percent) were classified as unlawful discrimination on grounds of religious belief.

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

The country has two registered Christian-associated political parties. There are no other religiously affiliated parties, although the law does not prevent the registration of parties based on other religions. Gordon Copeland, a Member of Parliament, has expressed interest in forming a third Christian party.

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 were fined up to A$1,000 (US$820) if they attempted to operate on the official holidays of Christmas Day, Good Friday, or Easter Sunday. (Australia New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Day is the only nonreligious holiday that carries similar fines.) The Government exempts businesses providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no instances of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were isolated instances of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders, including the Prime Minister, took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Incidents of religiously motivated violence are extremely rare. Due to the infrequency of their occurrence and difficulty in establishing such motivation, the police do not attempt to maintain data on crimes that may have been motivated by religion.

The Government-funded Human Rights Commission actively promoted tolerance on the issue of religious freedom. In addition to hosting the Asia Pacific Interfaith Dialogue in Waitangi in May 2007 and helping to develop the National Statement on Religious Diversity, the Commission maintains an ongoing Diversity Action Plan of which respect for religious diversity is a pillar.

SECTION IV. U.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 continues to maintain contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities and includes them at sponsored events when appropriate. The Embassy maintains an ongoing, open dialogue with all local interlocutors on the topics of religious freedom, tolerance, diversity, and related issues.

PALAU

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

An archipelago of more than 300 islands in the western Pacific Ocean, the country has an area of 188 square miles and a population of 19,900. Roughly 70 percent live in the Koror State. Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion in the country; approximately 65 percent of the population are members. Estimates of other religious groups with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church, 2,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 1,000; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 300; and Jehovah's Witnesses, 90. Modekngei, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has approximately 1,800 adherents. There also is a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims and a primarily Catholic Filipino expatriate community of 6,800 persons.

Since the arrival of Jesuit priests in the early-19th century, foreign missionaries have been active; some have been in the country for many years. The Seventh-day Adventist and Evangelical churches have missionaries teaching in their respective elementary and high schools.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government does not promote or restrain religious activities. The Government requires religious groups 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 mission agencies are exempt from paying taxes.

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

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. There is Government financial support for religious schools that may be requested by representatives of any religion. The Government also provides small-scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The Government recognizes Christmas as a national religious holiday. Even though the Government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities, state and national events as well as graduation ceremonies are always opened with prayer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stemmed from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshi citizens following complaints from employers that

workers' non-Christian religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employee 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 were no impediments to their practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with an area of 280,773 square miles and a population of 5,930,400. According to the 2000 census, 96 percent of citizens identify themselves as members of a Christian church. Churches with the most members are Roman Catholic, 30 percent; Evangelical Lutheran, 20 percent; United Church, 11.5 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 10 percent; Pentecostal, 8.6 percent; Evangelical Alliance, 5.2 percent; Anglican, 3.2 percent; Baptist, 2.5 percent; and the Salvation Army, 0.2 percent. Other Christian groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and the Jehovah's Witnesses, constitute 8 percent. Minority religious groups include the Baha'i Faith, Islam, and Buddhism. There are approximately 14,000 Mormons, 15,000 Jehovah's witnesses, 15,000 Baha'is, and 2,000 Muslims. Many citizens integrate their Christian faith with some indigenous beliefs and practices.

Western missionaries proselytized the country in the 19th century. Colonial governments initially assigned different missions to different geographic regions. 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 are now found throughout the country. The Muslim community has a mosque in the capital of Port Moresby with capacity for 1,500 worshipers. There are now seven Islamic centers. There are concentrations of Muslims in Port Moresby, Baimuru, Daru, Marshall Lagoon, and the Musa Valley and on the islands of New Britain and New Ireland.

Nontraditional Christian 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. Pentecostal and charismatic groups in particular have found converts within the congregations of the more established churches.

Missionaries of many traditions operate freely. New Tribes Mission was the largest missionary group, with approximately 390 missionaries in the country. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) partnered with the Department of Education and local communities in linguistic research, literacy, Bible translation, Scripture

use, and training. The Department of Education relies on SIL to produce translations of the Bible for Government-sponsored religious instruction in schools. As of June 2007, SIL had translated the New Testament into 163 of the country's indigenous languages.

The Roman Catholic Church was the only traditional church that still relied 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution's provisions for freedom of conscience, thought, and religion consistently have been interpreted to mean that any religion may be practiced or propagated as long as it does not interfere with the freedom of others. The predominance of Christianity is recognized in the preamble of the Constitution, which refers to "our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours"; however, there is no state religion.

During the period covered by this report, Government officials, including the Governor-General and the Prime Minister, attended rallies held by visiting Christian evangelists.

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

Churches continue to run most schools and many health services, and the Government provides support for those institutions. Upon independence, the Government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed to subsidize their operation on a per pupil or per patient basis. The Government also pays the salaries of national teachers and health staff. 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 issues in the Government.

Immigrants and noncitizens are free to practice their religions, 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. Representatives of Christian churches teach the lessons, and the students attend the class that is operated by the church of their parents' choice. Children whose parents do not wish them to attend the classes are excused. Members of non-Christian religious groups were not numerous, and it was not known if non-Christian religious groups had representatives to teach lessons. Nontraditional Christian groups such as Seventh-day Adventists and Mormons also teach religious lessons in 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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

As new missionary movements proliferated, representatives and individuals of some established churches questioned publicly, in denominational meetings and newspaper articles, whether such activity was desirable. However, the courts and Government practice have upheld the constitutional right to freedom of speech, thought, and belief, and no legislation to curb those rights has been adopted.

In the past there were incidents of discrimination against recently arrived Muslim immigrants, but there were no reports of such incidents during the period covered by this report.

The Council of Churches made the only known effort at interfaith dialogue. The council members included the Anglican, Gutnius Lutheran, Union Baptist, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, United Church, and the Salvation Army. In addition 15 parachurch organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association, participated in its activities. The ecumenical work of the Council of Churches is confined primarily to cooperation among Christian groups on social welfare projects. The Council of Churches does not include Seven-day Adventists or Mormons.

SECTION IV. U.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 held discussions with the Council of Churches and individual church leaders. The Ambassador and Embassy officials met regularly with local religious leaders and with U.S. citizen missionaries of many denominations and agencies.

PHILIPPINES

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The armed insurgent Muslim group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continued to seek greater autonomy. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government and the MILF maintained a cease-fire and continued their peace dialogue, brokered by the Government of Malaysia.

There was some ethnic, religious, and cultural discrimination against members of the Muslim minority by members of the Christian majority. This, combined with economic disparities, contributed to persistent conflict in certain provinces.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom problems with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy actively encouraged the peace process between the Government and MILF, while the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) provided some technical assistance.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 115,831 square miles and a population of 89 million.

Roman Catholics, the largest religious group, comprise 80 to 85 percent of the total population. El Shaddai, a local charismatic lay movement affiliated with the Catholic Church, claims a domestic membership of six million.

Islam is the largest minority religion. The most recent census, conducted in 2000, estimated the Muslim population between five and 9 percent of the total population. Muslims reside principally on Mindanao and nearby islands. Most 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 on Mindanao.

Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include a number of Christian denominations such as Seventh-day Adventists, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines, Assemblies of God, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Philippine (Southern) Baptists. In addition three churches are 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).

Christianity is the majority religious among indigenous peoples. An estimated number of between 12 million and 16 million indigenous persons follow either Catholicism or Protestantism. However, many indigenous groups mix elements of their native religious groups with Christian beliefs and practices.

Christian missionaries work actively throughout the country, including within Muslim communities in most parts of western Mindanao. Conversion of Christians to Islam is most typical among workers who have lived and worked in an Islamic country, largely because conversion brings social and economic benefits while abroad. Many of these "converts of convenience" remain Muslims upon their return to the country and are known collectively as "Balik Islam" ("return to Islam").

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There is no state religion, and the Constitution provides for the separation of church and state.

The law requires organized religious groups to register with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and with the Bureau of Internal Revenue to establish tax-exempt status. The law does not specify penalties for failure to register with the SEC. There were no reports of discrimination in the registration system during the period covered by this report.

The Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA) 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 helps coordinate the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, supervises endowment (auqaf) properties and institutions, and conducts activities for the establishment and maintenance of Islamic centers and auqaf projects. The presidential assistant for Muslim affairs helps coordinate relations with countries that have large Islamic populations and that have contributed to Mindanao's economic development and to the peace process.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools with the written consent of parents, provided there is no cost to the Government. Based on a traditional policy of promoting moral education, local public schools give church groups the opportunity to teach moral values during school hours. Attendance is not mandatory, and various churches share classroom space. The Government also allows interested groups to distribute religious literature in public schools. By law, public schools must ensure that the religious rights of students are protected. Muslim students are allowed to wear head coverings (hijab), and Muslim girls are not required to wear shorts during physical education classes. In many parts of Mindanao, Muslim students routinely attended Catholic schools from elementary to university level; however, these students were not required to receive Catholic religious instruction.

Approximately 14 percent of the school population in Mindanao attended Islamic schools. Government officials estimated the number of madrassahs (Islamic schools) at more than 2000. Of these, more than half were located in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). A total of 1,140 madrassahs seeking financial assistance from local and foreign donors are registered with the OMA, while only 40 are registered with the Department of Education. Most madrassahs did not meet the Department's accreditation standards. The Madrassa Development Coordinating Committee manages financial assistance to the madrassah system from local and international sources.

The Government continued to implement its unified curriculum, designed to integrate madrassahs into the national education system. Approximately 50 madrassahs in Mindanao were in the process of accreditation with the Department of Education at the end of the reporting period. Public elementary schools that have at least 25 Muslim students were ordered to begin offering Arabic language instruction and classes on Islamic values. Fifty-seven public elementary schools in Manila and all public elementary schools in the ARMM included Arabic language and Islamic values education in the curriculum for their Muslim students by the end of the reporting period. The Department of Education also provided text books on Arabic and Islamic values to these schools.

The Government's National Ecumenical Consultative Committee (NECCOM) fosters interfaith dialogue among major religious groups, including the Catholic Church, Islam, Iglesia ni Cristo, the Philippine Independent Church (Aglipayan), and Protestant denominations. Smaller Protestant denominations are represented in the NECCOM through the National Council of Churches of the Philippines and the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, two large networks of Protestant churches and mission groups. Members of the NECCOM meet periodically with the President to discuss social and political issues.

Officially recognized holy days include Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, All Saints' Day, and Christmas Day. Each year since 2002, the President has issued a proclamation declaring the feast of the end of Ramadan, known as Eid al-Fitr, a special nonworking holiday nationwide.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government does not ban or discourage specific religious groups or religious factions. However, Muslims—who are concentrated in many of the most impoverished provinces—complained that the Government has not made sufficient efforts to

promote their economic development. Some Muslim religious leaders asserted that Muslims suffered from economic discrimination.

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) argued that the Government should allow Islamic courts to extend their jurisdiction to criminal law cases, and some supported the MILF's goal of forming an autonomous region governed in accordance with Islamic law. As in other parts of the judicial system, the Shari'a courts suffered from a large number of unfilled positions. Aside from budget restrictions, judicial positions on the Shari'a courts were particularly difficult to fill because of the requirement that in addition to being members of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines, applicants must also be members of the Shari'a Bar.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On January 7, 2005, following the creation in 2004 of special Muslim police units, members of the unit in the Western Police District raided the Islamic Information Center in Manila and detained 17 suspected militants, including three women. Two suspects were charged with illegal possession of fire arms and explosives, but a regional trial court judge dismissed these charges in November 2005. The police released the remaining 15 suspects shortly after their arrest.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

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.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) seeks the immediate establishment of an independent Islamic state in the southwestern region of Mindanao. Mainstream Muslim leaders rejected its claimed religious affiliation, strongly criticizing its actions as "un-Islamic," and denounced terrorism as a means of achieving a satisfactory level of autonomy. The Government has attributed numerous attacks to the ASG.

On April 20, 2007, the ASG beheaded seven men in Jolo, Sulu. The ASG abducted the victims, six of whom were workers of a Government road project, on April 18 in the southern Mindanao town of Parang, Sulu, and demanded $105,300 (five million pesos) in exchange for the release of their captives, which local authorities refused to pay.

On January 10, 2007, triple bomb attacks were launched in the cities of General Santos, Kidapawan and Cotabato in Central Mindanao. Seven persons died and 30 others were injured. The military blamed the ASG and the international terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah for the attacks.

The Government also attributed some attacks to radical elements of the MNLF and MILF, a group that split from the original MNLF in 1978 and has been in negotiations with the Government for a peace accord during the reporting period.

On June 10, 2007, 10 armed Islamic militants formerly with the MILF allegedly abducted an Italian priest in Zamboanga, Mindanao. The Government immediately launched a search operation but had not found him at the end of the reporting period.

On April 13, 2007, an MNLF rogue leader declared "holy war" against the Government in retaliation for military attacks against MNLF camps in Mindanao.

In February 2007 an MNLF commander kidnapped several Government peace negotiators, releasing them 2 days later.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Historically, Muslims have been alienated socially from the Christian majority, and some ethnic and cultural discrimination against Muslims has been recorded. Young Muslim professionals reported that some employers have a biased expectation that Muslims would have lower education levels. Muslims reported that they had difficulty renting rooms in boarding houses or being hired for retail work if they used their real names or wore distinctive Muslim dress and thus resorted to the use of Christian pseudonyms and Western clothing.

Over the past 60 years, efforts by the dominant Christian population to resettle in traditionally Muslim areas such as Mindanao have fostered resentment among many Muslim residents. Many Muslims viewed Christian proselytizing as another form of resettlement with the intention of depriving Muslims of their homeland and cultural identity, including their religion.

Amicable ties among religious communities are common, and many participate in interdenominational efforts to alleviate poverty. The Interfaith Group, which is registered as a nongovernmental organization (NGO), including Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant representatives, continued to support the Mindanao peace process. There is an active Bishops' (Catholic)/Ulamas (Muslim) Conference in Mindanao.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom problems with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers regularly met with representatives of all major religious groups to discuss these problems and their concerns. In addition, the U.S. Government actively supported the Government's peace process with Muslim insurgents in Mindanao, which has the potential to contribute to peace and a better climate for interfaith cooperation.

The Embassy also maintained active outreach with NGOs. The Embassy hosted meetings of political and opinion leaders from the Muslim community to discuss the U.S. role in Mindanao. The Embassy continued to engage communities outside Manila. One notable program was the September 2006 visit of a Muslim-American imam, who met with religious leaders around the country to discuss interfaith cooperation and religious tolerance.

For Fiscal Year 2006, 59 percent of United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) $70 million budget for the country went to programs in Mindanao, mostly in the ARMM. USAID programs were instrumental in supporting the peace process and helped foster an environment for greater religious tolerance. One example of such an effort was a multi-year USAID program that helped 28,000 former MNLF members make the transition from fighters to productive farmers.

The Embassy also sought to help religious leaders broaden their horizons through the Mission's exchange programs. During the period covered in this report, the Embassy sent both Muslim and Christian leaders to the United States on International Visitor Program (IVP) grants. The Embassy also used two student exchange programs, ACCESS and YES, to enable Muslim students to study in the United States and learn about religious tolerance and pluralism from the perspective of other American youth. During the 2006 academic year, the YES Program sponsored 40 secondary students from the ARMM to spend the academic year living with an American family. Also in 2006, through the ACCESS program, 27 Muslim students attended a 4-week student exchange program with an American university.

SAMOA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 1,133 square miles and a population of 186,649. There are two main islands and seven islets in the group, with the majority of the population residing on the island of Upolu, where the capital, Apia, is located. Nearly 100 percent of the population is Christian. The 2001 census revealed the following distribution of Christian groups: Congregational Christian, 34.8 percent; Roman Catholic, 19.6 percent; Methodist, 15 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 12.7 percent; Assemblies of God, 6.6 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 3.5 percent. These statistics reflected continual growth in the number and size of Mormons and Assemblies of God and a relative decline in the membership of the historically larger denominations. The following groups constitute less than 5 percent of the population: Nazarene, Anglican, Congregational Church of Jesus, Worship Centre, Jehovah's Witnesses, Full Gospel, Peace Chapel, Elim Church, Voice of Christ, and Baptist. There are also members of other religions such as Islam and the Baha'i Faith—the country hosts one of only seven Baha'i Houses of Worship in the world. Although there were no official data, it is generally be-

lieved that there are also some practicing Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews in the capital city.

All religious groups are multiethnic; none is exclusively comprised of foreign nationals or native-born (Western) Samoans. There are no sizable foreign national or immigrant groups, with the exception of U.S. nationals from American Samoa. Missionaries operated freely within the country.

There is strong societal pressure at the village and local level to participate in church services and other activities, and financially support church leaders and projects. In some denominations, such financial contributions often total more than 30 percent of family income.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution provides for the right to choose, practice and change 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.

The preamble to the Constitution describes the country as "an independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and traditions." Although Christianity is favored constitutionally and public ceremonies typically begin with a Christian prayer, there is no official state religion. In practice village chiefs often choose the religious denomination of their extended families.

There are no requirements for the recognition of a religious group or for licenses or registration.

The Constitution provides freedom from unwanted religious indoctrination in schools but gives each religious group the right to establish its own schools. There are both religious and public schools; the latter do not have religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Church-run schools in most villages provide religious instruction following school hours.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, White Monday, and Christmas are considered national religious holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In February 2007 a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses attending a public high school, Vaimauga College, was rebuked by a teacher for not singing the national anthem at school assemblies because of his religious beliefs. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture accommodated the student's religious convictions by ruling that the student had to be present for assemblies but was not required to sing or otherwise participate.

In February 2007 the Lands and Titles Court ordered a native Samoan Seventh-day Adventist in the village of Safa'atoa Lefaga to suspend services in a church he had established on land held jointly with members of his family. The Court forbade him from holding weekly services on Saturdays (but not family evening devotional services) in his house on the family-owned property. The Court ordered that before conducting worship services, the individual must receive agreement from "some" of the family leaders or village chiefs, most of whom had opposed his request to allow services. The judgment passed by the Court in this particular case took into account the traditional practices (the Fa'a Samoa or "Samoan Way") oriented towards communal and family rights with some reference to constitutionally protected individual religious rights.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The Seventh-day Adventist case in Safa'atoa Lefaga is an example of the limited tension between Fa'a Samoa (Samoan Way) and individual religious rights. Most re-

ligions, and especially Christianity, have embraced and incorporated Fa'a Samoa protocols and customs.

SECTION IV. U.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 restricted this right in some circumstances.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. The Government has banned the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The Government does not tolerate speech or actions that it deems could adversely affect racial or religious harmony.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 270 square miles and a total population of 4.5 million, of whom 3.6 million are citizens or permanent residents. According to a 2000 Government survey, 85 percent of citizens and permanent residents profess some religious faith. Of this group, 51 percent practice Buddhism, Taoism, ancestor worship, or other religious practice traditionally associated with the ethnic Chinese population. Approximately 15 percent of the population is Muslim, 15 percent Christian, and 4 percent Hindu. The remainder is composed of adherents of other religions, agnostics, and atheists including small Sikh, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Jain communities. Among Christians, the majority of whom are ethnic Chinese, Protestants outnumber Roman Catholics by slightly more than two to one.

Approximately 77 percent of the population is ethnic Chinese, 14 percent ethnic Malay, and 8 percent ethnic Indian. Nearly all ethnic Malays are Muslim, and most ethnic Indians Hindu. The ethnic Chinese population is divided among Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity, or is agnostic or atheist.

Foreign missionaries are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricted 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 country's congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1972 and the Unification Church in 1982, making them unlawful societies. Such a designation makes it impossible to maintain a legal identity as a religious group, with consequences relating to owning property, conducting financial transactions, or holding public meetings.

The Government plays an active but limited role in religious affairs. For example, the Government seeks to ensure that citizens, most of whom live in Government-built 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 semiofficial relationship with the Muslim community through the Islamic Religious Council (MUIS). The MUIS advises the Government on concerns of the Muslim community, drafts the approved weekly sermon, regulates some Muslim religious matters, and oversees a mosque-building fund financed by voluntary payroll deductions. The Constitution acknowledges Malay/Muslims to be "the indigenous people of Singapore" and charges the Government specifically to promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and language interests.

The 1961 Women's Charter gives women, among other rights, the right to own property, conduct trade, and receive divorce settlements. Muslim women enjoy most of the rights and protections of the Women's Charter; however, for the most part, Muslim marriage law falls under the administration of the Muslim Law Act, which empowers the Shari'a court to oversee such matters. The act also allows Muslim men to practice polygamy. 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. In the period covered by this report, there were 44 applications for polygamous marriage and 13 applications were approved.

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. There were no complaints or reports to the Presidential Council on Minority Rights from Fiscal Year 2005/2006. Fiscal year 2006/2007 data was not available by the end of the reporting period.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

There are official holy days for each major religion in the country: Hari Raya Haji and Hari Raya Puasa for Muslims, Christmas and Good Friday for Christians, Deepavali for Hindus, and Vesak Day for Buddhists.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding indirectly by sponsoring activities to promote interethnic harmony. Because the primary ethnic minorities are predominantly of one faith each, Government programs to promote ethnic harmony have implications for interfaith relations. In February 2006, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong unveiled the Community Engagement Program (CEP). The goal of the CEP is to promote multiracial and interreligious harmony, in part so that a strong foundation would be in place should an incident that could provoke ethnic/religious discord, such as a religiously related terrorist attack, occur in the country. During the period covered by this report, the CEP has held numerous community-based seminars, worked with trade unions to form cluster working groups on religious and community harmony, and launched a new Web site as a platform for communication and dialogue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricts certain religious groups by application of the Societies Act. In 1982 the Minister for Home Affairs dissolved the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, also known as the Unification Church. In 1972 the Government deregistered and banned the Singapore Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that its existence was prejudicial to public welfare and order because its members refuse to perform military service (obligatory for all male citizens), salute the flag, or swear oaths of allegiance to the state. At the time, there were approximately 200 Jehovah's Witnesses in the country; at the end of the period covered by this report there were approximately 2,000. Although the Court of Appeals in 1996 upheld the rights of members of Jehovah's Witnesses to profess, practice, and propagate their religious belief, and the Government does not arrest members for being believers, the result of deregistration has been to make public meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses illegal. Nevertheless, since the 1996 ruling, no charges have been brought against persons attending or holding Jehovah's Witness meetings in private homes.

The Government can also influence religious practice through the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. The act was passed in 1990 and revised in 2001 in response to actions that the Government viewed as threats to religious harmony. This includes aggressive and "insensitive" proselytizing and "the mixing of religion and politics." The act established the Presidential Council on Religious Harmony, which reports to the Minister of Home Affairs and is empowered to issue restraining orders against leaders and members of religious groups to prevent them from carrying out political activities, "exciting disaffection against" the Government, creating "ill will" between religious groups, or carrying out subversive activities. These orders place individuals on notice that they should not repeat such acts; contravening a restraining order can result in fines of up to $6,622 (SGD 10,000) and up to 2 years' imprisonment for a first offense. The act also prohibits judicial review of its enforcement or of any possible denial of rights arising from it.

Missionaries, with the exception of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and representatives of the Unification Church, are permitted to work and to publish and distribute religious texts. However, while the Government does not prohibit evangelical activities, in practice it discourages activities that might upset the balance of intercommunal relations. Authorities did not detain any Jehovah's Witnesses for proselytizing during the period covered by this report or the previous 12-month period.

The Government has banned all written materials published by the International Bible Students Association and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, both publishing arms of the 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 $1,324 (SGD 2,000) and jailed up to 12 months for a first conviction.

There were no Government seizures of Jehovah's Witnesses literature already in the country during the previous 12-month period. In August 2006 one individual was detained briefly for attempting to bring Jehovah's Witnesses publications into the country from Malaysia. In this instance, the literature was confiscated and he was convicted of smuggling prohibited media. Authorities fined the individual $3,846 (SGD 6,000).

Two Jehovah's Witnesses students were suspended from school for refusing to sing the national anthem or participate in the flag ceremony during the period covered by this report.

At the end of the period covered by this report, there were 23 members of Jehovah's Witnesses incarcerated in the armed forces detention barracks because they refused to carry out the legal obligation for all male citizens to serve in the armed forces. Of these, 11 began their sentences during the period covered by this report. There were no other known conscientious objectors during the period covered by this report. The initial sentence for failure to comply with the military service requirement is 15 months' imprisonment, to which 24 months are added upon a second refusal. Failure to perform annual military reserve duty, which is required of all those who have completed their initial 2-year obligation, results in 40 sentences; a 12-month sentence is usual after four such refusals. All of the Jehovah's Witnesses in detention were incarcerated for failing to perform their initial military obligations and expect to serve a total of 39 months.

The Compulsory Education Act of 2000 mandates attendance at public schools for all children, with few exceptions. In response to concern from the Malay/Muslim community regarding the fate of madrassahs, the Government temporarily exempted madrassah students from compulsory school attendance, allowing attendance at a madrassah in lieu of a public school. However, according to local press reports, if a madrassah does not meet minimum academic standards by 2008, its students would have to transfer either to a madrassah that does meet such standards or to a public school.

There were no religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief.

Ethnic Malays constituted the great majority of the country's Muslim community. Attitudes held by the Malay and non-Malay communities regarding one another are based on both ethnicity and religion, which in effect are impossible to separate.

The Government enforced ethnic ratios for publicly subsidized housing, where the majority of citizens live and own their own units. The policy was designed to prevent ethnic/racial ghettos. When a housing development is at or near the limit for a particular ethnic group, the policy sometimes compels owners to sell their apartments to persons of underrepresented groups.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom matters 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 respected this right in practice.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago with an area of 10,985 square miles and a population of 566,800. Approximately 92 percent of the population is affiliated with one of the following Christian churches: Anglican, 35 percent; Roman Catholic, 19 percent; South Seas Evangelical, 17 percent; Methodist, 11 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 10 percent. An estimated 5 percent of the population, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, practice indigenous animistic religions. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Muslims, the Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Unification Church, and indigenous churches that have broken away from the major Christian denominations. There are believed to be members of other religious groups within the foreign community who were free to practice, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies. According to the most recent reports, there are approximately 350 Muslims.

Christianity was brought to the country in the 19th and early-20th centuries by missionaries representing several Western denominations. Some foreign missionaries continue to work in the country. Except for the Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy is approximately 45 percent foreign, the clergy of the established churches is nearly entirely indigenous.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Department of Home Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterized its role as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression on the one hand, and maintaining public order on the other. All religious institutions are required to register with the Government, and there were no reports that registration was denied to any group.

In general the Government does not subsidize religion. However, several schools and health services were built and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There are schools sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Melanesia (Anglican), 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 instead to subsidize their operations.

The public school curriculum includes an hour of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed upon by the Christian churches. Students whose parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. The Government subsidizes church schools only if they align their curriculums with governmental criteria. Although non-Christian religions may be taught in the schools, there was no such instruction during the period covered by this report. However, the administrations of the Government primary and secondary schools in Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita, recently requested multifaith instruction from the Baha'i community.

Customarily, Government oaths of office are taken on the Bible. The Constitution forbids religious tests for public office.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Joint religious activities, such as religious representation at national events, were organized through the Solomon Islands Christian Association, which is composed of the five traditional churches of the country. Occasionally individual citizens have used denominational meetings or newspaper articles to voice their objections to the activities of nontraditional denominations and suggest that they be curtailed. Decisions made by some villages to mandate only Sunday worship for Christians have marginalized Seventh-day Adventists. The society in general, however, is tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government through the U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea and its consular agency office in the Solomon Islands 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 respected 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 operated freely, and the Government's practice of not recognizing any new religious groups did not restrict the activities of unregistered religious groups. The Government officially limits the number of foreign missionaries that may work in the country, although unregistered missionaries were present in large numbers and were allowed to live and work freely.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, in the far southern border provinces, continued separatist violence resulted in increasingly tense relations between the Buddhist and Muslim communities.

The U.S. 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 198,000 square miles and a population of 64 million. According to the Government's National Statistics Office, approximately 94 percent of the population is Buddhist and 5 percent is Muslim; however, non-governmental organizations, academics, and religious groups estimated 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. According to the Religious Affairs Department (RAD), the numbers of atheists or persons who do not profess a religious faith 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 encompass groups of diverse ethnic and national origin, including descendants of immigrants from South Asia, China, Cambodia, and Indonesia. The RAD reported that there are 3,567 registered mosques in 64 provinces, of which 2,289 are located in the 5 southernmost provinces. According to the RAD, 99 percent of these mosques are associated with the Sunni branch of Islam. Shi'a mosques make up the remaining 1 percent.

According to RAD statistics, there are an estimated 351,987 Christians in the country, constituting 0.5 percent of the population. There are several Protestant denominations, and most belong to one of four umbrella organizations. The oldest of

these groupings, the Church of Christ in Thailand, was formed in the mid-1930s. The largest is the Evangelical Foundation of Thailand. Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists are recognized by authorities as separate Protestant denominations and are organized under similar umbrella groups.

According to the most recent Government survey in 2002, there are 9 recognized tribal groups (chao khao), comprised of approximately 920,000 persons. Syncretistic practices drawn from Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and spirit worship are common among the tribal groups. The Sikh Council of Thailand estimates the Sikh community to have a population of approximately 70,000 persons, most of whom reside in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Nakhon Ratchasima, Pattaya, Samui Island, and Phuket. There are 18 Sikh temples in the country. According to RAD statistics and local Hindu organizations, there are an estimated 95,000 Hindus in the country.

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.

Religious groups proselytized 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. According to the National Buddhism Bureau, as of December 2006 there are 6,458 Dhammaduta working in the country. In addition, the Government sponsored the international travel of another 1,414 Buddhist monks sent by their temples to disseminate religious information. Muslim organizations reported having small numbers of citizens working as missionaries in the country and abroad. Christian organizations reported much larger numbers of missionaries, both foreign and Thai, operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, it restricted the activities of some groups. On September 19, 2006, in a bloodless coup d'etat, the military overthrew the Government and repealed the Constitution. On October 1, 2006, the military coup leaders promulgated an interim Constitution, established an interim government, and convened a Constitutional Drafting Assembly to draft a new Constitution. Legal experts maintained that the interim Constitution incorporates by reference many of the civil rights and protections contained in the 1997 Constitution. The repealed 1997 Constitution required that the monarch be a Buddhist. This provision was retained in the April 2007 first draft of the country's next Constitution. The state religion in effect is Theravada Buddhism; however, it is not officially designated as such. During the reporting period, some Buddhist organizations called for the designation of Buddhism as the state religion in the new draft Constitution, but as of June 2007 such a provision had not been included.

The repealed 1997 Constitution stated that discrimination against a person on the grounds of "a difference in religious belief" shall not be permitted. The September 2006 interim Constitution appears to retain by reference this prohibition against discrimination, and it has been included explicitly in the April 2007 draft Constitution. There was no significant pattern of religious discrimination during the period covered by this report.

The repealed 1997 Constitution and the interim Constitution by reference provided for, and citizens generally enjoyed, a large measure of freedom of speech; however, laws prohibiting speech likely to insult Buddhism remain in place. The 1962 Sangha Act specifically prohibits the defamation or insult of Buddhism and the Buddhist clergy. Violators of the law could face up to 1 year imprisonment or fines of up to $5,800 (188,000 baht). The Penal Code prohibits the insult or disturbance of religious places or services of all officially recognized religions.

The Government plays an active role in religious affairs. The RAD, which is located in the Ministry of Culture, registers religious organizations. Under the provisions of the Religious Organizations Act, the RAD recognizes a new religion if a national census shows that it has at least 5,000 adherents, has a uniquely recognizable theology, and is not politically active. A religious organization must be accepted into an officially recognized ecclesiastical group before the RAD will grant registration. During the reporting period, there were five recognized religious groups: Buddhists, Muslims, Brahmin-Hindus, Sikhs, and Catholics. Four Protestant groups are recognized as subgroups of the Catholics. Government registration confers some benefits, including access to state subsidies, tax-exempt status, and preferential allocation of

resident visas for organization officials. However, since 1984 the Government has not recognized any new religious groups. In practice, unregistered religious organizations operated freely, and the Government's practice of not recognizing any new religious groups did not restrict the activities of unregistered religious groups.

The repealed 1997 Constitution required the Government "to patronize and protect Buddhism and other religions." The September 2006 interim Constitution appears to retain by reference this protection for religion, and it has been included explicitly in the April 2007 draft Constitution. The State subsidizes activities of the three largest religious communities (Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian). The Government allocated approximately $92.6 million (3 billion baht) during Fiscal Year 2007 to support the National Buddhism Bureau, which was established in 2002 as an independent state agency. The office oversees the Buddhist clergy and approved the curricula of Buddhist teachings for all Buddhist temples of educational institutions. In addition, the bureau promotes the Buddhist faith by sponsoring educational and public relations materials on the faith and practice in daily life.

For Fiscal Year 2006 the Government, through the RAD, budgeted $950,000 (30.8 million baht) for Islamic organizations and $88,000 (2.85 million baht) for Christian, Brahman-Hindu, and Sikh organizations.

The budgets for Buddhist and Muslim organizations included funds to support Buddhist and Muslim institutes of higher education, fund religious education programs in public and private schools, provide daily allowances for monks and Muslim clerics who hold administrative and senior ecclesiastical posts, and subsidize travel and health care for monks and Muslim clerics. Also included is 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. Other registered religious groups can request Government support for renovation and repair work but do not receive a regular budget to maintain religious buildings, nor do they receive Government assistance to support their clergy. In 2007 the Government budgeted approximately $580,000 (18.8 million baht) for the restoration of religious buildings of religious groups, of which $362,000 (11.7 million baht) was allotted for the Muslim community, $145,000 (4.7 million baht) for the Christian, Brahmin-Hindu, and Sikh communities, and $73,000 (2.4 million baht) for special projects of all communities. Private donations to registered religious organizations are tax deductible.

Religious instruction is required in public schools at both the primary and secondary education levels. The Ministry of Education has formulated a course called "Social, Religion, and Culture Studies," which students in each grade study for 1 to 2 hours each week. The course contains information about all of the recognized religions in the country. Students who wish to pursue in-depth studies of other religions or of their belief may study at the religious schools and can transfer credits to the public school. Schools, working in conjunction with their local school administrative board, are authorized to arrange additional religious studies courses. The Supreme Sangha Council and the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand have created special curriculums for Buddhist and Islamic studies.

There are a variety of Islamic education opportunities for children. Tadika is an after-school religious course for children in grades one through six, which is under the supervision of the RAD, except for the three southern provinces of Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani, where the courses were supervised by the Ministry of Education. The education generally takes place in a mosque. According to Government statistics, as of April 2007 there were 1,618 registered Islamic Religious and Moral Education centers teaching Tadika in the 3 southern provinces, with 170,989 students and 5,749 teachers. In the remainder of the country, the RAD registered 994 centers, with 110,783 students and 2,693 teachers. For secondary school children, the Ministry of Education allows two separate curriculums for private Islamic studies schools. The first type teaches only Islamic religious courses. As of April 2007 there were 107 schools with 2,044 students and 277 teachers using this curriculum in the 3 southern provinces. The Government registers but does not certify these schools, and students from these schools cannot continue to any higher education within the country. The number of this type of school declined because students opted to attend schools that afford alternatives for higher education. The second curriculum teaches both Islamic religious courses and traditional state education coursework. As of April 2007, 144 schools with 72,618 students used this curriculum in the 3 southern provinces. 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 that provided by traditional, privately operated religious day schools, known as pondok schools. As of April 2007, there were 328 registered pondok schools primarily in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat Provinces. Previously, these religious schools were not required to

register with the Government and received no Government oversight or funding. The registration effort began in April 2004 following an attack on a military post and arms depot in Narathiwat in January 2004. Government investigations into that incident led the authorities to pursue suspects associated with pondok schools. The total number of pondoks is still unknown. Sources believed that there could be as many as 1,000.

The Government actively sponsors interfaith dialogue. The abrogated 1997 Constitution required the State to "promote good understanding and harmony among followers of all religions." This language was included in the April 2007 draft Constitution. The Government funds regular meetings and public education programs. These programs included the RAD annual interfaith meeting for representatives and members of all religious groups certified by RAD. The programs also included monthly meetings of the 17 member Subcommittee on Religious Relations, located within the Prime Minister's National Identity Promotion Office (the subcommittee is composed of one representative from the Buddhist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, Hindu, and Sikh communities in addition to civil servants from several Government agencies). The RAD held an interfaith event focusing on religious youth from June 26–28 in Chonburi Province, just outside of Bangkok. Approximately 250 youth from across the country attended. In July 2006 the RAD organized another interfaith convention in Surat Thani, which had approximately 1,000 participants. The RAD sponsored a public relations campaign promoting interreligious understanding and harmony, including prime-time television announcements. However, a continuing separatist insurgency by militant ethnic Malay Muslims in the southernmost provinces led to concerns that the violence may be contributing to increased tensions between the local Buddhist and Muslim communities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Falun Gong abandoned a petition challenging the Government's September 2005 denial of their application to register as an association with the Office of the National Cultural Commission. The petition was abandoned after no action had been announced on a second petition submitted to the police department to print and distribute a weekly Falun Gong magazine. The group was able to print and distribute religious materials both in Thai and Chinese on a small, informal basis for free distribution. Falun Gong maintained a Web site that advertises daily gatherings in Bangkok.

The Government does not recognize religious groups other than the five existing groupings; however, unregistered religious organizations operated freely.

Although unregistered missionaries were 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. There were close to 1,500 registered foreign missionaries in the country, most of them Christian. During the period covered by this report, the Government increased by 10 slots its quota for Christian missionaries. In addition to these formal quotas, far more missionaries, while not registered, were able to live and work in the country without Government interference. While registration conferred some benefits, such as longer terms for visa stays, being unregistered was not a significant barrier to foreign missionary activity. Many foreign missionaries entered the country using tourist visas and proselytized or disseminated religious literature without the acknowledgment of the RAD. There were no reports that foreign missionaries were deported or harassed for working without registration. Muslim professors and clerics, particularly in the far south, continue to face additional scrutiny because of continued Government concern about the resurgence of Muslim separatist activities; however, this did not appear to interfere with their activities or their ability to practice their faith.

Muslim female civil servants were not permitted to wear headscarves when dressed in civil servant uniforms; however, in practice most female civil servants were permitted by their superiors to wear headscarves if they wished, particularly in the country's southernmost provinces. Muslim female civil servants not required to wear uniforms were allowed to wear headscarves.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On April 9, 2007, in the Southern Yala Province, four Muslim youths were killed while riding in a pickup truck by what the press reported were Government-backed Buddhist village defense volunteers.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, religious groups closely associated with ethnic minorities, such as Muslims, experienced some societal economic discrimination. Such discrimination appeared to be linked more to ethnicity than to religion. Continued violence in the far southern regions of the country contributed to negative stereotypes of Muslims held by persons from other geographic areas of the country. Killings clearly targeted at Buddhists increased ethnic tensions between Muslim and Buddhist communities in the far south.

Violent acts committed by suspected separatist militants in the Muslim-majority provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkhla, and Yala affected the ability of some Buddhists in this predominantly Muslim region to undertake the full range of their traditional religious practices. During the reporting period, 13 suspects were arrested and were in the process of being tried for the deaths of a Buddhist monk and two novices in an October 2005 attack on a Buddhist temple in Pattani Province.

There were almost daily attacks by suspected separatist militants in the country's southernmost provinces on both Government officials and Buddhists and Muslim civilians. On March 14, 2007, assailants ambushed a van in Yala Province killing eight Buddhist passengers including two teenage girls. That evening, 2 bombs exploded outside a nearby mosque and teashop, killing 3 Muslims and injuring 20. On March 19, 2007, gunmen killed three Muslim students and injured seven others at an Islamic boarding school in Songkhla Province. The violence contributed to an atmosphere of fear and suspicion in the southern provinces. As a result of a series of increasingly provocative attacks, the level of tension between the local Muslim and Buddhist communities continued to grow. Government officials and observers expressed concern that the violence could result in open communal conflict.

On October 11, 2006, a monk was injured by a bomb in Narathiwat Province. Three others were injured in a separate incident on October 23. The monks were performing the morning ritual of receiving donations of food and were guarded by three armed soldiers, one of whom subsequently died from the explosion.

At the end of the reporting period, no one had been arrested for the 2004 killing of three Buddhist monks and the beheading of one civilian Buddhist rubber tapper, or for the 2004 attacks on Buddhist temples and one Chinese shrine in the southern provinces of the country. The Government continued to investigate these incidents in the context of security operations involving the ongoing separatist violence in the South. Buddhist monks continued to report that they were fearful and thus no longer able to travel freely through southern communities to receive alms. They also claimed that laypersons sometimes declined to assist them in their daily activities out of fear of being targeted by militants. 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.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers regularly visit Muslim religious leaders, academics, and elected officials as part of the Embassy's goal of understanding the complex ethnic and religious issues at play in society. In July 2006 the Embassy hosted a speaker program on Muslim life in America designed to share peaceful strategies for dealing with religious and cultural diversity, to strengthen civic tolerance, and to discuss the importance of religious freedom, among other goals.

During the Fiscal Year 2006, nine Muslims from a broad range of professions participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program. During their visits to the United States, they had the opportunity to observe individuals from all religious groups openly practice their faith freely and without conflict.

TONGA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago with a land area of 288 square miles and a population of 101,200. According to the last official census in 1996, membership by percentage of population of major religious groups was: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 41 percent; Roman Catholic Church, 16 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 14 percent; Free Church of Tonga, 12 percent; and all other groups, 17 percent. However, both Roman Catholics and Mormons state that the number of their adherents is higher than reported, and a 2006 survey conducted by the Free Wesleyan Church revealed its membership comprised only 35 percent of the population. The Tokaikolo Church (a local offshoot of the Methodist Church), Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Anglicans, the Baha'i Faith, Islam, and Hinduism have small numbers of adherents.

Foreign missionaries are active in the country and operate freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion. Registration of religious groups is recommended by the Government for tax purposes, but 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.

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 other businesses, regardless of a business owner's religion.

There were a number of schools operated by Mormons and by the Free Wesleyan Church.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government-owned Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) maintains policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines state that in view of "the character of the listening public," those who preach on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga must confine their preaching "within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition." All religious groups are permitted to host programs on Radio Tonga and TV Tonga, but discussions of the basic tenets of non-Christian religions are not permitted. Notices of activities of all churches were broadcast on both Radio Tonga and TV Tonga as well as on privately owned radio and television stations.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government did not maintain a resident Embassy in the country; the U.S. Ambassador in Suva, Fiji, is accredited to the Government of Tonga. 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 held discussions with Wesleyan, Mormon, Catholic, and Baha'i officials as well as non-governmental organizations, such as the Catholic Women's League, during visits to the country.

TUVALU

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

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 of 9 island groups with a total area of 10 square miles and a population of 9,500. The Church of Tuvalu, which has historic ties to the Congregational Church and other churches in Samoa, has the largest number of followers. Government estimates of religious affiliation as a percentage of the population include: Church of Tuvalu, 91 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 3 percent; Baha'i, 3 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; and Roman 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. The Tuvalu Brethren Church, a new charismatic Protestant group, is said to have as many as 300 adherents, some 3 percent of the population, but this could not be confirmed by independent sources.

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.

Missionaries are present and operate freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There is no state religion, and the Constitution provides for separation of church and state. The preamble of the Constitution says the country is "an independent State based on Christian principles, the Rule of Law, and Tuvaluan custom and tradition." Government ceremonies at the national and island council levels, such as the opening of Parliament, often include Christian prayers and clergy. By law, any new religious group with more than 50 members must register; failure to register could result in prosecution.

Missionaries generally practiced without restriction.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

At the end of reporting period, the Appeals Court had not yet met to hear the appeal of the Tuvalu Brethren Church. In 2005 the country's Chief Justice upheld the right of traditional island elder councils to restrict the constitutional right to freedom of religion in cases where they contended it could threaten traditional mores and practices. The Brethren case is the first appeal of a High Court decision in Tuvalu's history as an independent nation, and the Appeals Court has never been constituted since independence. According to the Constitution, the Court of Appeals has jurisdiction to determine appeals from decisions of the High Court, whether in the exercise of original jurisdiction or appellate jurisdiction. The Government cited costs as grounds for the Appeals Court having not yet been established.

In June 2006 despite a High Court injunction against such action, the Nanumanga council of elders dismissed without proper notice five council workers

who were members of the Brethren Church. This was the result of an April 2006 decision by the Nanumanga council to pass a resolution that banned all new churches and threatened local civil servants with dismissal if they worshipped with the Brethren Church.

In January 2006, the council of elders on the main island of Funafuti issued a resolution prohibiting the establishment or practice of "any new religion." The ban was primarily aimed at the Brethren Church. The ban forbids meetings and worship by members of the Brethren Church and specifically prohibited the construction of a new Brethren church. The High Court issued a temporary injunction prohibiting any further actions against the Brethren Church and its missionary work. By the end of the reporting period, the matter had not yet to come to trial.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were isolated reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief and practice in the case of the Brethren Church and other groups perceived as outside the mainstream on some outer islands. In some cases, local traditional leaders discouraged groups from proselytizing or holding meetings, claiming that "new" religions may be disruptive to traditional societal structures.

Members of the Church of Tuvalu exert considerable influence in the social and political life in the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain a resident Embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is also accredited to the Government. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Fiji visited the country periodically and discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of the overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials discussed with the chief justice his 2005 and 2006 decisions regarding the rights of traditional authorities to restrict freedom of religion in certain circumstances. Embassy officials also met with representatives of religious communities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that have an interest in religious freedom. The Embassy actively supported efforts to expand governmental and societal awareness of and protection for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion. Embassy officials met with representatives of most denominations in the country to hear their views on trends in religious tolerance and to encourage an open attitude to religious freedom. They also raised the issue of the Brethren Church with members of Government, NGOs and the office of the public defender.

VANUATU

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 by the Government during the period covered by the report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, some churches and individuals objected to the missionary activities of nontraditional religious groups and continued to suggest they be curtailed. During the reporting period, there was some controversy regarding a planned visit by the Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon. No visit took place, but pressure remained on the Government from some religious groups to deny an entry visa.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago with an area of 4,707 square miles and a population of 220,000. Approximately 83 percent of the population is Christian. An estimated 32 percent is Presbyterian, 13 percent Roman Catholic, 13 percent Anglican, and 11

percent Seventh-day Adventist. Groups that together constitute 14 percent include the Church of Christ, the Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God, and other Christian denominations. The John Frum Movement, a political party that also is an indigenous religious group, is centered on the island of Tanna and includes about 5 percent of the population. The Baha'i Faith, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) also are active. There are believed to be members of other religions within the foreign community; they 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, approximately 90 percent of the clergy of the established churches are now indigenous. The Summer Institute of Linguistics is active in translating the Bible into the country's many indigenous languages.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The preamble of the Constitution refers to a commitment to "traditional Melanesian values, faith in God, and Christian principles;" however, the Constitution also provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full, and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Religious organizations are required to register with the Government; however, this law is not enforced.

The Government interacts with churches through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Vanuatu Christian Council. Customarily, Government oaths of office are taken on the Bible. The Government does not provide any funds for construction of churches.

The Government 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. There are a small number of non-Christian religious schools in country.

Government schools schedule time each week for religious education conducted by representatives of Council churches, using materials designed by those churches. There is no uniform standard time for religious instructions across all schools; however, the standard curriculum requires that Year 7 through 12 students are allocated an hour a week dedicated to religious instruction. The Education Act allows parents to have their children excused from religious classes. However, in practice, as the school is responsible for children during the school day, they require students to be in class at all times. Hence, most students attend a class linked to their denomination. Current classes emphasize the history and tenets of Christianity, and respect for authority.

Aside from the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, use of Government resources to support religious activities is not condoned (although there is no 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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practices; however, some churches and individuals objected to the missionary activities of nontraditional religious groups and continued to suggest that they be curtailed.

In rural areas, traditional Melanesian communal decision-making predominates. If a member of a community proposes to introduce a significant change within the community, such as the establishment of a new church, the chief and the rest of the community must agree. If a new church is established without approval, the

community views the action as a gesture of defiance by those who join the new church, and as a threat to community solidarity. However, religious tension 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

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship; however, Government restrictions still remained on the organized activities of religious groups.

The status for the respect of religious freedom and practice continued to experience important improvements during the reporting period. The Government deepened implementation of its 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief and supplemental decrees on religious policy issued in 2005, (referred to as the Government's "legal framework on religion.") New congregations were registered throughout the country's 64 provinces; a number of religious denominations were registered at the national level; and citizens were generally allowed to practice religion more freely. Improving economic conditions in the country also allowed for greater access to religious practice and resources. In recognition of its "significant improvements towards advancing religious freedom," the U.S. Department of State lifted the country's designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for Religious Freedom in November 2006.

Despite progress during the reporting period, problems remained in the implementation of the country's legal framework on religion. These included slowness, and in some cases inaction, in the registration of Protestant congregations in northern Vietnam and the Northwest Highlands; inconsistent application of procedures for congregation registration and other legal requirements; ongoing restrictions on religious recruitment; difficulties in the establishment of Catholic seminaries and Protestant pastor training courses; and unresolved land expropriation claims involving a number of religious denominations. Some provincial authorities were more active, while others appeared not to consider positive and consistent implementation of the legal framework on religion as a priority. The Government rejected the appointment of two Catholic bishops endorsed by the Vatican. However, the Catholic Church reported that the Government generally continued to ease restrictions on church assignment of new clergy, and the Church indicated that it had begun exploring with Government authorities the establishment of additional Catholic seminaries.

The Government continued to remain concerned that some ethnic minority groups active in the Central Highlands were operating a self-styled "Dega Church," which reportedly mixes religious practice with political activism and calls for ethnic minority separatism. The Government also actively restricted the leadership of the unrecognized Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) and maintained that it would not recognize this organization under its current leadership. The Government maintained a prominent role overseeing recognized religions. Religious groups encountered the greatest restrictions when they engaged in activities that the Government perceived as political activism or a challenge to its rule. The Government continued to ban and actively discourage participation in one unrecognized faction of the Hoa Hao Buddhists. Government authorities imprisoned and disrobed a number of ethnic Khmer Buddhists for their involvement in antigovernment protests in the Mekong Delta in early 2007. Some religious figures, including Catholic priest Nguyen Van Ly and Protestant pastor Nguyen Van Dai, were sentenced to prison terms for their political activism.

Nevertheless, overall respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. Participation in religious activities throughout the country continued to grow, and Protestant believers in the Central Highlands continued to report significant improvements in their situation. Approximately 40 Protestant house churches were registered in northern Vietnam and hundreds in southern Vietnam during the reporting period. However, hundreds of other applications remained pending, especially in the Northwest Highlands. For the first time since 1975, the

Government authorized the printing of Bibles in three ethnic minority languages in the Central Highlands. During the reporting period, Protestantism remained the country's fastest growing religion among its six recognized faiths—Buddhism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Caodaism, and Islam.

The Government registered several new religious denominations during the reporting period, including the Vietnam Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Grace Baptist Church, the United World Mission Church, one faction of the Mennonite church, the Baha'i Faith, and two smaller Buddhist groups—the Tu An Hieu Nghia group and the Pure Land Buddhist Home Practice Association.

During the reporting period, the national and some provincial Committees on Religious Affairs (CRA) were active in resolving religion-related problems and concerns. The national CRA organized a number of programs to offer training to members of religious denominations on legal registration procedures and to local authorities on how to implement the national legal framework on religion. On the occasion of the Asian Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) Summit and the visit of President George W. Bush to Hanoi in November 2006, the country's first-ever ecumenical religious service was held, led by the Catholic archdiocese of Hanoi and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN). In January 2007 the Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visited the Vatican and met with Pope Benedict XVI, and in March 2007, an official delegation from the Vatican reciprocated by visiting the country.

Protestants and Catholics across the north reported improvement in most officials' attitude towards their religion, and in general Protestants and Catholics were allowed to gather for worship without harassment, despite some isolated incidents. Christmas and Easter holidays passed generally without incident in the country. In the fall of 2006, the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV) reported its first-ever graduating class of 219 ordained pastors since the organization was officially recognized in 2001. During the reporting period, the Government welcomed the return of Buddhist Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh for a series of "reconciliation prayer events" in Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, and Hanoi.

There were no known instances of societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the reporting period.

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. consulate general in Ho Chi Minh City maintained an active and regular dialogue with senior and working-level Government officials to advocate greater religious freedom. U.S. officials also met and communicated regularly with religious leaders, including religious activists under Government scrutiny. The U.S. Ambassador and other U.S. officials, including the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, raised concerns about the registration and recognition difficulties faced by religious organizations, the difficulties Protestants faced in the Central and Northwest Highlands, and other restrictions on religious freedom with the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Government cabinet ministers, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) leaders, senior provincial officials, and others. Both President Bush and Secretary of State Rice, in meetings with their counterparts throughout the year, called for continued improvements in religious freedom. Religious freedom was also covered in the U.S.-Vietnam 2007 Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue.

In September 2004 then-Secretary of State Colin Powell designated the country a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In November 2006 Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice lifted the country's CPC designation, noting that the country could "no longer be identified as a severe violator of religious freedom" as defined by the Act.

Although the international media highlighted arrests and detentions of several political dissidents in early 2007, all individuals raised by the United States as prisoners of concern for reasons connected to their faith have been freed by the Government. Some religious sources have cited diplomatic intervention, primarily from the United States, as a reason why the Government is seeking to legalize more religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 127,000 square miles and a population of 83.5 million. Some estimates suggested that more than half of the population is at least nominally Buddhist. The Roman Catholic Church comprises 8 to 10 percent, several Cao Dai organizations comprise 1.5 to 3 percent, one Hoa Hao organization 1.5 to 4 percent, two Protestant organizations 0.5 to 2 percent, and one Muslim organization less than 0.1 percent of the population. Most other citizens consider themselves non-

religious, although many practice traditional beliefs such as veneration of ancestors and national heroes.

Buddhism is the dominant religious belief. Many Buddhists practice an amalgam of Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucian traditions that sometimes is called the "triple religion." The Committee for Religious Affairs cited an estimate of 12 percent (10 million) practicing Mahayana Buddhists, most of whom are members of the ethnic Kinh majority and found throughout the country, especially in the populous areas of the northern and southern delta regions. There are proportionately fewer Buddhists in certain highland areas, although migration of Kinh to these areas is changing this distribution. A Khmer ethnic minority in the south practices Theravada Buddhism. Numbering more than one million persons, they live almost exclusively in the Mekong Delta.

There are an estimated six to eight million Catholics in the country, although official Government statistics put the number at 5.9 million. Catholics live throughout the country, but the largest concentrations remain in the southern provinces around Ho Chi Minh City, in parts of the Central Highlands, and in the provinces southeast of Hanoi. Catholicism has in recent years revived in many areas, with newly rebuilt or renovated churches and growing numbers of persons who want to be religious workers.

Official Government statistics put the number of Cao Dai at 2.3 million, although Cao Dai officials routinely claim as many as four million adherents. Cao Dai groups are most active in Tay Ninh Province, where the Cao Dai "Holy See" is located, in Ho Chi Minh City, and throughout 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.

According to the Government, there are 1.2 million Hoa Hao followers; affiliated expatriate groups estimate that there may be up to three million followers. Hoa Hao followers are concentrated in the Mekong Delta, particularly in provinces such as An Giang and Dong Thap, where the Hoa Hao were dominant as a social, political, and military force before 1975. The Government-recognized Hoa Hao Administrative Committee (HHAC) was organized in 1999. Some Hoa Hao belong to other sects that oppose the HHAC.

The two officially recognized Protestant churches are the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV), and the smaller Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN). Estimates of the number of Protestants in the country ranged from official Government figures of 610,000 to claims by churches of more than 1.6 million. There were estimates that the growth of Protestant believers has been as much as 600 percent over the past decade, despite past Government restrictions on proselytizing and other church activities. Some of these new converts belong to unregistered evangelical house churches. Based on adherents' estimates, two-thirds of Protestants are members of ethnic minorities, including H'mong, Dzao, Thai, and other minority groups in the Northwest Highlands, and members of ethnic minority groups of the Central Highlands (Ede, Jarai, and Mnong, among others).

Mosques serving the country's small Muslim population, estimated at between 50,000 to 80,000 persons, operate in western An Giang Province, Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and provinces in the southern coastal part of the country. The Government officially estimates there are approximately 67,000 Muslim believers. The Muslim community is composed mainly of ethnic Cham, although in Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang Province it includes some ethnic Vietnamese and migrants originally from Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. Approximately half of the Muslims in the country are Sunnis, 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 reside in Ho Chi Minh City, with 2,000 residing in neighboring Dong Nai Province. Another 5,000 live in the south central coastal provinces of Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan. The other half of Muslims practices Bani Islam, a type of Islam unique to the ethnic Cham who live on the southern central coast.

There are several smaller religious communities, the largest of which is the Hindu community. Approximately 50,000 ethnic Cham in the south-central coastal area practice a devotional form of Hinduism. Another 4,000 Hindus live in Ho Chi Minh City; some are ethnic Cham, but most are Indian or of mixed Indian-Vietnamese descent.

There are an estimated 6,000 members of the Baha'i Faith, largely concentrated in the south. Prior to 1975 there were an estimated 200,000 believers, according to Baha'i officials. Open practice of the Baha'i Faith was banned from 1975 to 1992, and the number of believers dropped sharply during this time.

There are several hundred members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) throughout the country but primarily in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi.

At least 10 active but officially unrecognized congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses are present in the country, each reportedly with several hundred members. Most of the congregations are in the south, with five in Ho Chi Minh City.

At least 14 million citizens comprising 17 percent or more of the population reportedly do not practice any organized religion. Other sources strictly define those whose activities are limited to visiting pagodas on ceremonial holidays to not be practicing Buddhists. Using this stricter definition the number of nonreligious persons in the country would be much higher, perhaps reaching as many as 50 million. No statistics were available on the level of participation in formal religious services, but it was generally acknowledged that this number continued to increase since the early 1990s.

Ethnic minorities constitute approximately 14 percent of the overall population. Ethnic minorities historically practice different traditional beliefs than those of the ethnic majority Kinh. Many ethnic minorities, particularly among the H'mong, Dao, and Jarai groups in the Northwest and Central Highlands, have converted to Protestantism.

Undeclared missionaries from several countries are active in the country. Foreign missionaries legally are not permitted to proselytize or perform religious activities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, legal code, and a 2003 Communist Party Central Committee resolution on religion provide for freedom of belief and worship, as well as nonbelief; however, the Government required the registration of all activities by religious groups and used this requirement to restrict activities in certain cases. Further, the Government continued to significantly limit the organized activities of independent religious groups and those individuals who were regarded as a threat to party authority.

The new Ordinance on Religion and Belief which came into effect in November 2004, serves as the primary document governing religious practice. It reiterates citizens' rights to freedom of belief, freedom of religion, and freedom not to follow a religion, and it states that violations of these freedoms are prohibited. However, it advises that "abuse" of freedom of belief or religion "to undermine the country's peace, independence, and unity" is illegal and warns that religious activities must be suspended if they negatively affect the cultural traditions of the nation.

The Ordinance continues the practice of Government control and oversight of religious organizations. Under its provisions, religious denominations must be officially recognized or registered, and the activities and leadership of individual religious congregations must be approved by the appropriate lower-level authorities. The establishment of seminaries and the organization of and enrollment in classes must also be approved by appropriate authorities. The naming of priests or other religious officials requires the approval of authorities only when a "foreign element," such as the Vatican, is involved. The ordinance also relaxes Government oversight of religion to some extent. For example, religious organizations are required only to inform appropriate authorities of their annual activities or the investiture and transfer of clerics, while in the past this required explicit official approval. Further, the ordinance encourages religious groups to carry out charitable activities in health care and education, which were limited in the past.

In February 2005 the Prime Minister issued the "Instruction on Some Tasks Regarding Protestantism," which calls on authorities to facilitate the requests of recognized Protestant denominations to construct churches and to train and appoint pastors. Further, the instruction directs authorities to help unrecognized denominations register their congregations so that they can worship openly and move towards fulfilling the criteria required for full recognition. The instruction directs authorities in the Central and Northwest Highlands to help groups of Protestant believers register their religious activities and practice in homes or "suitable locations," even if they do not meet the criteria to establish an official congregation. The instruction also directs local officials to allow unregistered "house churches" to operate so long as they are "committed to follow regulations" and are not affiliated with separatist political movements.

In March 2005 the Government issued an implementing decree (Decree 22) that provided further guidance on the Ordinance on Religion and Belief. Like the ordinance, the decree explicitly bans forced renunciations of faith. It also delineates specific procedures by which an unrecognized religious organization can register its

places of worship, its clerics, and its activities and thus operate openly. It further provides procedures for these groups to apply for official recognition from the Government to gain additional rights. The decree specifies that a religious organization must have 20 years of "stable religious operation" in the country in order to be recognized by the Government. It also states that past operation in the country can be counted toward this requirement. The decree further sets out specific time periods for the Government to consider requests from religious organizations and requires officials to give organizations an explanation in writing for any application that is rejected.

Implementing Decree 22 also clarifies the procedures through which religious organizations and individual religious congregations can seek official recognition. Recognized religious denominations, in principle, are allowed to open, operate, and refurbish places of worship, train religious leaders, and obtain permission for the publication of materials. To obtain official recognition, a denomination must first receive national-level registration. According to the legal framework, a religious organization must pass through three legal stages to receive national-level registration. First, it must apply for and receive registration in each local administrative area in which it operates. Registration requires a congregation to file information with relevant provincial authorities about its structure, leadership, and activities. Authorities then have 45 days to raise questions or concerns. National-level registrations have a 60-day consideration period. The CRA must issue a license before an organization is considered registered. Once a congregation is registered at the local level, it can apply for provincial and then national-level registration. Following a minimum 1-year waiting period, the eligible organization can apply for recognition and must receive Government approval of its leadership, its structure, and the overall scope of its activities.

Decree 22 further specifies that the appropriate authorities provide a written response to requests for official recognition within 30, 45, 60, or 90 days, depending on the scope of the request. Government officials rarely adhered to these response times, however. In the case of a refusal, a specific reason must be included in the written response, although this requirement also did not appear to be applied systematically. Moreover, there is no specific mechanism for appeal in the ordinance, nor are the reasons for denying a request restricted in any way.

The national-level Committee for Religious Affairs is charged with disseminating information about the new legal framework to authorities at the provincial, district, commune, and village levels and assuring uniform compliance. Implementation of the new legal framework at lower levels of the Government continued to be mixed. During the reporting period, national and provincial authorities held a number of training courses for lower-level officials about the new laws to ensure their understanding and compliance with the legal framework. Authorities in some areas actively engaged religious leaders in efforts to implement the changes, particularly the registration of Protestant groups and the reopening of closed churches in the Central Highlands region. Some authorities in other areas, particularly in some parts of the Central Highlands and the Mekong Delta, as well as the northern border area and Northwest Highlands provinces, were less active in enforcing the legal changes mandated by the central Government, although conditions for Protestants generally improved throughout the country during the reporting period.

National security and national solidarity provisions in the Constitution override laws and regulations providing for religious freedom, and these provisions reportedly have been used to impede religious gatherings and the spread of religion to certain ethnic groups. The Penal Code, as amended in 1997, established penalties for offenses that are defined only vaguely, including "attempting to undermine national unity" by promoting "division between religious believers and nonbelievers." In the past authorities used Article 258 of the Penal code to charge persons with practicing religion illegally. This article allows for prison 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." Article 258 was not used to hinder religious practice during the reporting period.

The Government does not officially 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." However, many party and Government officials openly practice traditional ancestor worship, and some visit Buddhist pagodas. The prominent traditional position of Buddhism does not affect religious freedom for others adversely, including those who do not practice a religion.

The Government officially recognizes Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Muslim religious organizations. The Baha'i Faith was registered nationally in 2007 and would be eligible to apply for national recognition in 2008. Indi-

vidual congregations within each of these religious groups must be registered as well. Some leaders and believers of alternative Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai organizations of these religions do not participate in the Government-approved religious associations.

The Government's "White Book" reported that, as of the end of 2006, the Government registered 718 SECV places of worship and officially recognized 67 SECV congregations and 71 SECV pastors.

During the reporting period, the Government processed pilot registrations for approximately 40 ECVN congregations in 9 northern provinces. The CRA asserted that the pilot program was "a necessary step to avoid possible contradictions and complications in families and clans that might negatively affect the stable life of ordinary people." Furthermore, "the results secured in the provinces . . . of northern Vietnam have guided and would continue to guide religious persons and groups to register their religious activities in accordance with the Prime Minister's Instruction." As of the end of 2006, the Government claimed it had recognized 16 religious organizations affiliated with 6 religions under implementation of the new framework.

There are no religious national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The constitutional right of freedom of belief and religion continued to be interpreted and enforced unevenly. In some areas local officials allowed relatively wide latitude to believers; in other provinces members of unrecognized religious groups were sometimes subject to harassment from local officials. Government practices and bureaucratic impediments placed some restrictions on religious freedom and growth, although in many areas Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, as well as the Government itself, reported an increase in religious activity and observance. Officially recognized religious groups faced limitations in obtaining teaching materials, expanding training facilities, building new houses of worship, publishing religious materials, and expanding the number of clergy in religious training in response to increased demand from congregations. However, the Government continued to ease limitations compared to previous years.

Because of the lack of due process in the legal system and inconsistent high-level oversight, the actions of religious adherents can be subject to the discretion of local officials in their respective jurisdictions. In some cases, local officials reportedly told religious leaders that national-level laws do not apply to their jurisdictions. In other cases, different provinces applied the same laws differently. For example, the Central Highlands province of Gia Lai closely followed Government policy and registered all of the SECV "meeting points" in the province pending their future recognition. However, in neighboring Dak Lak and Binh Phuoc provinces, many SECV "meeting points" remained unregistered. In certain cases recognized and unrecognized Protestant groups were able to overcome local harassment or overturn negative local decisions when they have appealed to higher-level authorities.

During the reporting period, obstacles to religious growth and training remained. These included impediments to registration for Protestant congregations in northern Vietnam, an unresolved ECVN property claim that has prevented the establishment of a pastors training facility, failure by Dien Bien provincial authorities to register their local Catholic diocese, failure of Ha Giang authorities to grant legal residency to a parish priest, restrictions by the authorities in Thua Thien-Hue province on Catholic seminary recruitment and Baptist Church property claims, and legal restrictions on proselytizing. In some provinces house churches were required to submit lists of all worshipers as part of the registration process in contravention of the legal framework on religion. This phenomenon appeared to be widespread in the Mekong Delta but was been noted elsewhere in the country, including in north-central Thanh Hoa Province. In some cases the authorities removed this requirement following the protests of the registering groups; in other cases the requirement was maintained, impeding the registration process.

The Government continued to ban and actively discourage participation in certain unrecognized religious groups, including the outlawed UBCV and some Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai groups.

The Government requires all Buddhist monks to be approved by and work under the officially recognized Buddhist organization, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS). The number of Buddhist student monks is controlled and limited by the Committee on Religious Affairs, although the number of Buddhist academies at the local and provincial levels has increased in recent years in addition to several university-equivalent academies.

In the Mekong Delta, reliable information indicated that at least 10 ethnic Khmer monks were derobed and subjected to disciplinary action, including detention and

pagoda arrest, for participation in a protest or protests against the authorities in early 2007.

The Government continued to oppose efforts by the outlawed UBCV to operate and continued to restrict the movement of UBCV leaders. In August 2006 the Government allowed Thich Huyen Quang to travel to Ho Chi Minh City for 2 months for medical treatment but discouraged him from returning to Ho Chi Minh City in 2007. However, Thich Quang Do and Thich Huyen Quang were able to receive visits from foreign diplomats. Thich Quang Do was on occasion able to see other UBCV members during the period covered by this report. Thich Quang Do and some other UBCV leaders also were able to maintain contact with associates overseas. However, provincial leaders of the UBCV throughout southern Vietnam came under pressure. In one case a nun on the representative board of the UBCV in Khanh Hoa Province faced severe harassment beginning in March 2006 and reportedly was forced out of the pagoda she founded. UBCV chapters in central Vietnam were able to gather to celebrate Buddha's birthday in May 2006 and May 2007, but its leaders in HCMC and in Binh Dinh province were unable to organize similar celebrations.

The Government technically maintains veto power over Vatican appointments of bishops and exercised that veto authority over the nomination of two bishops in early 2007. For the most part, however, the Government has in practice cooperated with the Catholic Church in nominations for bishops' appointments. The Church operates 6 seminaries in the country, with more than 1,000 students enrolled, as well as a new special training program for "older" students. All students must be approved by local authorities for enrolling in a seminary and again prior to their ordination as priests. The Church believed that the number of students being ordained remained insufficient to support the growing Catholic population and indicated it would like to open additional seminaries and enroll new classes more frequently; however, it received no official response from the Government.

The Government continued to remain concerned that some ethnic minority groups active in this region were operating a self-styled "Dega Church," which reportedly mixes religious practice with political activism and calls for ethnic minority separatism. This factor complicated and slowed the registration and recognition process for other churches in the Central Highlands.

Despite improved conditions over the reporting period, SECV and house churches in the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, and Dak Nong continue to be under close Government scrutiny.

A number of Protestant house church organizations, including the Baptists, Presbyterians, and United World Mission Church, also operated in the Central Highlands. These groups reported substantially improved conditions for their congregations.

The Government continued its oversight and, with varying degrees of success, exerted control over religious hierarchies, organized religious activities, and other activities of religious groups through Committees for Religious Affairs at the national and provincial levels.

Several hundred ECVN congregations applied to register during the reporting period; however, most applications remained pending or were rejected, at least initially. Reasons cited for registration rejections, more often than not, included bureaucratic impediments, such as incorrect application procedures or forms, or incomplete information. Less frequently, local authorities cited vague security concerns, saying either that their political authority could be threatened or that confrontations could occur between traditional believers and recently converted Christians in a certain geographic area. Despite some registrations in the Northwest Highlands during the reporting period, much work remained in processing both Protestant and Catholic registrations there.

The Hoa Hao have faced some restrictions on their religious and political activities since 1975, in part because of lingering Communist Party suspicions stemming from the Hoa Hao's armed opposition to Communist forces dating back to French colonial rule. After 1975, all administrative offices, places of worship, and social and cultural institutions connected to the Hoa Hao faith were closed. Believers continued to practice their religion at home, but the lack of access to public gathering places contributed to the Hoa Hao community's isolation and fragmentation. In 1999, a new official Hoa Hao body, the Hoa Hao Administrative Council, was formed. In the spring of 2005, the Hoa Hao Administrative Council was expanded and renamed the Executive Committee of Hoa Hao Buddhism. Several leaders of the Hoa Hao community, including several pre-1975 leaders, openly criticized the Committee. They claimed that the committee was subservient to the Government and demanded official recognition, instead, of their own Hoa Hao body, the Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church (HHCBC). Although still unregistered, on May 4, 2005, the HHCBC held an organizational meeting that was attended by 126 delegates

from across the southern part of the country. However, its members faced significant official repression.

Frictions between some Hoa Hao activists and Government officials in the Mekong Delta continued during the reporting period.

In May 2007 a court in the Mekong Delta province of Dong Thap sentenced four Hoa Hao followers to between 4 and 6 years in prison for "creating public disorder" under aticle 245 of the 1999 Penal Code. The four were arrested for their involvement in a June 2006 hunger strike protesting the arrest and imprisonment of other Hoa Hao sect members in 2005 as well as more general allegations of Government suppression of the Hoa Hao faith.

Eight Cao Dai believers were imprisoned in July 2005 for up to 13 years for "fleeing abroad to oppose the Government" and "propagating documents against the Vietnamese Government to incite demonstrations and riots." The group had attempted to protest Government control over the Cao Dai church in September 2004 in Phnom Penh but were arrested and expelled to Vietnam.

There are no formal prohibitions on changing one's religion. However, formal conversions appear to be relatively rare, apart from those that occur when non-Catholics marry Catholics. Many converts may find the conversion procedures overly cumbersome or fear Government retribution. There were isolated reports that local officials in rural communities continued to discourage conversion to Protestantism by threatening converts that they would lose education and social welfare allowances. A national CRA-produced training manual for local officials being used in the north was found to contain language telling officials to encourage recent religious converts to return to their traditional beliefs. The Government has pledged to diplomats and foreign representatives that it would revise the problematic language, acknowledging that it may not have been in compliance with regulations.

The Government controls and monitors all forms of public assembly, including assembly for religious activities; however, during the reporting period, some large religious gatherings were allowed.

Article 35 of Decree 22 requires Government approval for foreign missionary groups to proselytize. Such activities should take place under the sponsorship of a national or local religious organization. It discourages public proselytizing outside of recognized worship centers, including by citizens. Some missionaries visited the country despite this official prohibition and carried on informal proselytizing activities.

In April 2006 the Ho Chi Minh City-based New Life Fellowship Church (NLF) was able to hold its first large prayer meeting for foreigners since August 2005 on the grounds of a Ho Chi Minh City hotel. The NLF, which catered to both foreigners and citizens and is headed by a foreign missionary, was prevented from gathering in Ho Chi Minh City hotels in August 2005 after it launched and advertised services for local citizens in contravention to the law. Since then, foreigners in the NLF were able to gather in smaller groups at home. The NLF remained in discussion with city- and national-level officials to find a permanent, legal solution to its status. Other expatriate-only groups did not face any Government harassment. At least one expatriate church group received a formal operating license from the HCMC Government in mid-2007.

Government policy does not permit persons who belong to unofficial religious groups to speak publicly about their beliefs, but some continued to conduct religious training and services without harassment. Members of registered religious organizations are permitted to speak about their beliefs and attempt to persuade others to adopt their religions in recognized places of worship but are discouraged from doing so elsewhere.

The Government requires all religious publishing to be done by the Religious Publishing House, which is a part of the Office of Religious Affairs, or by other Government-approved publishing houses after the Government first approves the proposed items. The Religious Publishing House printed 130 new religious titles during the reporting period, including Bibles in two Central Highlands ethnic languages. A range of Bibles, Buddhist sacred scriptures, 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 been published in full. The Bible is printed in Vietnamese, Chinese, Ede, Jarai, and English. However, in January 2007 authorities seized Bibles and other religious materials that were printed abroad, belonging to a Protestant house church group in HCMC, on the grounds

that any "foreign language" material that has not been explicitly authorized by the Government is illegal. The group later purchased Government-approved bibles for distribution.

The Government allows travel for religious purposes, but the approval of authorities is required for participation in religious conferences and training courses abroad. Muslims are able to undertake the Hajj, and Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant officials have generally been able to travel abroad for study and for conferences. Other unofficial leaders travel internationally on a regular basis. Religious persons who traveled abroad in the past were sometimes questioned about their activities upon their return and required to surrender their passports; however, this practice appeared to be becoming more infrequent.

Religious affiliation is indicated on citizens' national identification cards and in "family books," which are household identification documents. In practice, many citizens who consider themselves religious do not indicate this on their identification cards, and Government statistics list them as nonreligious. 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. The Government does not designate persons' religions on passports.

The Government allows, and in some cases encourages, links between officially recognized religious bodies and coreligionists in other countries; however, the Government actively discourages contacts between the UBCV and its foreign Buddhist supporters.

Contacts between some unregistered Protestant organizations and their foreign supporters are discouraged but occur regularly, including training and the provision of financial support and religious materials. The Government remained concerned about contact between separatist "Dega" Protestants in the Central Highlands and overseas supporters. The Government regards Dega Protestants as a group that uses religion as a rallying point to encourage ethnic minority separatism, political unrest, and the establishment of an independent ethnic minority state.

Adherence to a religious faith generally does not disadvantage persons in nongovernment civil, economic, and secular life, although it likely would prevent advancement to higher CPV, Government, and military ranks. The military does not have a chaplaincy. Avowed religious practice was formerly a bar to membership in the CPV, but now the CPV claims that tens of thousands of the more than three million Communist Party members are religious believers. 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 visit pagodas, temples, and churches, making a special point to visit Protestant churches over Christmas.

The 2005 Implementing Decree for the Ordinance on Religion and Belief stipulates that provincial People's Committees must approve the construction of new religious facilities. The renovation or upgrade of religious facilities also requires notification of authorities, although not necessarily a permit, depending on the extent of the renovation. The Decree stipulates that authorities must respond to a construction permit application within 20 days.

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 Communist Party school. Several Catholic nuns and at least one Catholic priest teach at Ho Chi Minh City universities. They are not allowed to wear religious dress when they teach or to identify themselves as clergy. Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Buddhist groups are allowed to provide religious education to children. 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. Religious groups are not permitted to operate independent schools beyond preschool and kindergarten.

Provincial authorities have returned a limited number of church properties confiscated following the reunification of the country in 1975 and remained in protracted discussions on other properties. One of the vice chairmen of the Government-recognized VBS stated that approximately 30 percent of Buddhist properties confiscated in Ho Chi Minh City were returned, and from 5 to 10 percent of all Buddhist properties confiscated in the south have been returned. Catholic and recognized Protestant organizations obtained a small number of previously confiscated properties, but continued to have ongoing disputes with officials over others. The SECV estimated more than 250 properties for which it seeks restitution; other Protestant denominations active in southern Vietnam pre-1975 also had property

claims. Some properties were returned to the Hoa Hao Administrative Council, but few Cao Dai properties were returned, according to church leaders. Many of the properties seized in the past were religious schools and hospitals that were incorporated into the state system.

Although the Ordinance on Religion and Belief encourages religious organizations to conduct charitable activities in education and healthcare, the degree of Government oversight of these activities varied greatly among localities. In some areas, especially in the south, Catholic priests and nuns operated kindergartens, orphanages, vocational training centers, and clinics and engaged in a variety of other humanitarian projects. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, the Catholic Church was involved in supporting HIV/AIDS hospices and treatment centers and providing counseling to young persons. Buddhist groups also were involved in HIV/AIDS and other charitable work across the country. The Ho Chi Minh City archdiocese ran the HIV/AIDS clinic at the Trong Diem drug rehabilitation center on behalf of the city government. The city government and the Catholic Church remained in discussion about how to officially approve new initiatives, such as a walk-in clinic for possible HIV/AIDS victims, but it allowed the Church to pursue these initiatives quietly. Charitable activities by the Catholic Church were much more restricted in northern Vietnam, but during the reporting period, a number of northern provinces were reported to have become more permissive. Thai Binh Province, for example, actively encouraged the Catholic Church's work in HIV/AIDS and the treatment of the sick and disabled. Haiphong authorities also began working with the Catholic Church in areas related to drug addiction treatment and HIV/AIDS during the reporting period. Thanh Hoa Province has engaged its Catholic Diocese on religious infrastructure and general reconstruction programs. The Province of Hanoi allowed a number of VBS-run temples to run orphanages for abandoned and disabled children, as well as treatment programs for those that suffer from HIV/AIDS.

The VBS engaged in humanitarian activities, including antidrug and child welfare programs, in many parts of the country. The officially recognized Hoa Hao organization also reported that it engaged in numerous charitable activities and local development projects during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Reports of abuses of religious freedom continued to diminish during the period covered by this report; however, some religious believers continued to experience harassment or repression because they operated without legal sanction. In a number of isolated instances, local officials repressed Protestant believers in some parts of the Central and Northwest Highlands and other areas by forcing church gatherings to cease, closing house churches, and pressuring individuals to renounce their religious beliefs, often unsuccessfully.

Some ethnic minority worshipers in the Central Highlands—particularly in areas suspected to be affiliated with the "Dega Church"—continue to be prevented from gathering to worship. However, the number of credible reports of incidents was significantly lower compared with previous years and appeared to reflect individual bias at the local level rather than official central Government policy. In a number of instances, the local officials involved were reprimanded or fired.

Restrictions on UBCV leaders remained in place, with much of the leadership's freedom of movement, expression, and assembly limited. There were fewer credible reports that officials arbitrarily detained, physically intimidated, and harassed persons based, at least in part, on their religious beliefs and practice, particularly in mountainous ethnic minority areas.

In early 2007 local authorities in Ben Tre Province refused to register a Protestant house church; police subsequently sought to prevent the church group from gathering. According to religious leaders, a house church in Tra Vinh Province in the Mekong Delta was prevented from holding Easter services in 2006. Bibles and other religious materials were confiscated. In Kien Giang in January 2006 police banned the gathering of a house church affiliated with the Methodist community and confiscated identification documents of a visiting pastor. In December 2005 police interrupted Christmas services of some house churches in Can Tho, Long An, and Vinh Long provinces, also in the Mekong Delta. In May 2005 Protestant House Church preacher Nguyen Van Cam told a reporter that local authorities in Dong Lam Commune of Tien Hai District, Thai Binh Province, had tried on several occasions to convince him to sign documents committing him to stop holding house church services.

In June 2006, in Thanh Hoa Province, two Protestant worshippers were beaten by local police. In December 2006 local police reportedly beat Evangelist believers at a house church gathering in Quang Ninh Province. Also, in December 2006 local

authorities aggressively broke up a meeting with students at an ECVN congregation house church in Thua Thien-Hue Province.

Baptist pastor Than Van Truong was released in September 2005 after spending 1 year involuntarily committed to a mental asylum by authorities in Dong Nai Province as punishment for his religious and political beliefs. He was reportedly released on the condition that he sign a document certifying his mental illness, making him subject to readmission to a mental institution should he "relapse." Pastor Truong continued to be closely monitored by local officials. There were confirmed reports that he continued to be harassed and his religious activities curtailed in Dong Nai and in his home village in Bac Giang Province in northern Vietnam where he has helped organize a small church. In June 2006 diplomats were permitted by the Government to visit the Bac Giang church and to investigate allegations of harassment with local officials.

Protestant pastor and house church leader Nguyen Hong Quang was imprisoned in 2004 and released in September 2005 in an official amnesty. In May 2006 Pastor Quang and some followers were detained for nearly 24 hours following a confrontation with local police over new construction at Pastor Quang's house, which also served as a local house church. However, the Government's claim that Pastor Quang willfully ignored zoning regulations and local officials' orders to comply with zoning regulations was supported by evidence.

In August 2005 there were credible reports that local officials attempted to force an SECV lay preacher to renounce his faith and stop his ministry in the ethnic minority Hre village in Quang Ngai Province. Unidentified parties reportedly burned his house down in retaliation. The small Protestant community continued to face harassment through May 2006. However, following central Government intervention, the harassment appeared to cease and one of the two preachers involved in the dispute was allowed to attend an SECV pastoral training course.

During this reporting period, there were few credible reports of leaders of nonregistered churches in the Central and Northwest Highlands being harassed or detained and pressured to renounce their faith.

The dissemination of the legal framework on religion has remained a slow process, especially in northern Vietnam and the Northwest Highlands, and through the end of the period covered by this report, many leaders of places of worship reported that police and other authorities had not implemented fully these legal codes. During the reporting period, some Protestants in the northern and Northwest Highlands provinces reported that local officials often used legal pretexts to prevent religious registration.

In early June 2007, local ECVN congregants in Bat Xat District in Lao Cai Province reported that local government authorities, including members of a Border Protection special task force, came to the district to conduct training on the Legal Framework laws. According to the congregants, local authorities imposed fines of up to approximately $100 (1.7 million Dong VND) on eight "illegal Protestants" and imposed material fines (apparently confiscating chickens) on nine others. The "illegal Protestants" were accused of following Protestantism without seeking permission from provincial authorities.

In March 2006 in Vi Xuyen District of Ha Giang Province, local authorities fined a house church pastor $32 (VND 500,000), or more than half of his monthly salary, for traveling to Hanoi to pick up registration forms from the ECVN. In addition, lay deacons of the church were fined $6 (VND 100,000) each for "being Protestant" and for signing documents requesting registration for their group.

In January 2006 in Xin Man District of Ha Giang, district-level authorities told an unregistered Protestant congregation, "If five or more of your members gather together, we will prosecute you." The group submitted an application to register but had not received any official response to their request.

Despite significant improvements in the Central Highlands, SECV congregations in some districts of Dak Lak province faced some restrictions on operations. Conditions appeared even more restrictive in Sa Thay District in Kontum Province, where senior district-level officials in early 2006 argued that there was "no religion" in the area, although more recent reports from Kontum indicate that the situation there is improving. There were indications that, at least in some cases, more senior Government officials intervened and rebuked local authorities for harassing house churches in contravention of the Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism. In a few incidents in the Mekong Delta, local authorities reportedly increased harassment of groups that submitted applications to register.

Although stating that regular and systematic Government interference of their religious services had stopped since 2004, members of the United Gospel Outreach Church (UGOC) in southern Long An Province still claimed harassment from local level officials in a meeting with the Ambassador in August 2006. In June 2006, the

owners of four UGOC house churches were briefly detained on the grounds that it was illegal for an unregistered church to hold services. The UGOC in Long An is unable to hold regular overnight religious retreats, to get permission to hold gatherings for 50 or more persons, or to hold regular bible training classes. UGOC members claim they can publish and disseminate religious materials "if done quietly."

In June 2007 a group of 150 pastors of the Inter-Evangelistic Movement Bible Church (IEM) were detained on buses for several hours by southern Binh Phuoc Province authorities after a prayer gathering of 2,000 followers. Local authorities complained to and questioned leaders about their "evangelizing and organization of a large crowd without a permit." The group was later allowed to return to HCMC, and the head of the Provincial CRA offered to assist in IEM's provincial registration applications.

It has been even more difficult for IEM followers in several locations in Northwest Dien Bien Province, where police actively broke up meetings of worshippers, and authorities refused to register IEM meeting points. Followers there submitted credible reports that they were forced to "meet secretly at night, in the fields" in order to pray. Local authorities also actively pressured IEM followers there to abandon their faith and return to traditional beliefs. This has continued on and off for several years.

It was difficult to determine the exact number of religious detainees and religious prisoners because there was little transparency in the justice system, and it was very difficult to obtain confirmation of when persons were detained, imprisoned, tried, or released. The Government claimed that it did not hold any religious prisoners; such persons were usually convicted of violating national security laws or general criminal laws. Some observers estimate a high number of religious prisoners, generally as a result of including individuals arrested for participation in "Dega" groups or in the clashes between police and ethnic minority protestors in February 2001 and April 2004. The Government, as well as many official and unofficial religious leaders, depicted the protests as being motivated by disputes over land or other socioeconomic grievances rather than religious concerns. Determining the facts in these cases is extremely difficult.

At least 15 individuals, including UBCV monks Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do and Catholic priest Pham Van Loi, were held in conditions resembling house arrest for reasons related primarily to their political beliefs or attempts to form nonauthorized organizations, despite the apparent lack of any official charges against them. The movement of a number of other UBCV, Cao Dai, Catholic, Hoa Hao, and Protestant dignitaries and believers was restricted or was watched and followed by police. Two members of the HHCBC, Tran Van Thang and Tran Van Hoang, were arrested on February 25, 2005, and sentenced to 6 and 9 months' imprisonment respectively "for producing and distributing 'illegal' recordings of the Hoa Hao faith." In addition, they were fined $1,640 (26 million VND) each.

With Ma Van Bay's release in September 2006, all individuals raised by the United States as prisoners of concern for reasons connected to their faith were freed by the Government.

Forced Religious Conversion

The Implementing Decree of the Ordinance on Religion and Belief states, "Acts to force citizens to follow a religion or renounce their faith . . . are not allowed." The Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism contains a similarly worded statement. While Government officials stated that forced conversions or renunciation of faith had always been illegal, these were the first legal documents to state so explicitly. Religious contacts from the Central and Northwest Highlands reported that attempted forced renunciations continued to decrease. A few incidents were reported during the period covered by this report.

Local officials in several northwestern villages continued to attempt to convince or force H'mong Protestants to recant their faith. Local authorities encouraged clan elders to pressure members of their extended families to cease practicing Christianity and to return to traditional practices. Similarly, in May 2006, authorities in Cha Cang Commune, Muong Lay District, northern Dien Bien Province, reportedly pressured believers from several Protestant house churches to construct traditional altars in their homes and to sign documents renouncing Protestantism.

In March 2007 credible reports cited that police in East Dien Bien District of Dien Bien Province were involved in separate incidents: hitting an IEM pastor, banning IEM worshippers from gathering, confiscating religious materials, fining some followers and forcing others to cut wood, and going to IEM followers' individual homes to pressure them to abandon their faith. In one incident local police reportedly told followers that "believing in Christ is to believe in the United States."

In April 2007 other credible reports cite that police in Minh Hoa District in northern Quang Binh Province confiscated Bibles from IEM followers and pressured followers to abandon their faith, telling them reportedly that Protestantism "was a bad American religion."

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The status of respect for religious freedom improved significantly during the period covered by this report. Compared to previous years, the Government continued to ease limitations on restrictions placed upon Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hao, Baha'i, and Caodaists. The Government nationally registered the Baha'i faith in March 2007, and the organization would be eligible for national recognition in 2008. Much of the change came from stronger implementation of significant revisions to the legal framework governing religion instituted in 2004 and 2005 and a more positive Government attitude toward Protestant groups. Many recognized and unrecognized religious groups, especially Protestant groups in the Central and Northwest Highlands regions, reported that the situation for their practitioners continued to improve overall. In addition, the central Government continued to actively train, inform, and encourage provincial and local authorities to comply with regulations under the legal framework on religion.

During the period covered by this report, SECV-affiliated churches and house churches generally reported improved conditions in the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, and Dak Nong. At least 45 new Protestant SECV congregations "meeting points" in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc Province were registered or recognized in the period covered by this report.

Most SECV congregations and meeting places in the Central Highlands were able to register their activities with local officials and allowed to operate without significant harassment. For example, hundreds of places of worship were allowed to operate in Gia Lai, effectively legalizing operations for tens of thousands of believers in the province. The SECV also opened a number of new churches in Gia Lai, Dak Lak, and Dak Nong Provinces. In addition, the SECV continued to conduct Bible classes in these provinces to provide training to preachers in the region, allowing them to receive formal recognition as pastors. Ordination of new pastors is a key step in the formal recognition of additional SECV churches. Gia Lai authorities also facilitated the construction of a new SECV church in Chu Se District. In May 2006, 266 leaders attended a session in Hue conducted by the CRA that explained the registration process, and another 300 attended a similar conference in Ho Chi Minh City.

By early 2007 there were more than 800 SECV "meeting points" registered in the Central Highlands and another approximately 150 registered places of worship affiliated with other religious organizations in the region. Seventy-one SECV pastors and newly appointed pastors were recognized. In August 2006 a new Protestant training center was approved and opened in Ho Chi Minh City.

Officials in most of the northern provinces acknowledged the presence of Protestants and stated that, in keeping with the Government's instructions, they planned to expedite registration of some congregations. Of approximately 1,000 Protestant congregations that have submitted applications to register, only 40 have been approved; however, ECVN contacts in the Northwest Highlands confirmed that most unregistered congregations were allowed to worship in their homes and to meet openly during the daytime, with the full knowledge of authorities—a marked improvement from the past.

Police and other Government officials in the Northwest Highlands worked with house church leaders in some areas to inform them of the new regulations. The CRA conducted training sessions across the north to educate provincial and district officials about the new religious regulations so that they would "implement these policies in an orderly fashion." The CRA also conducted training seminars for religious leaders. In April 2006, 247 clergy participants from various religious groups attended a seminar in Hanoi conducted by the CRA that explained the registration process.

Many pastors of Protestant denominations such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, United Gospel Outreach Church, and Assemblies of God preferred not to join the SECV or ECVN because of doctrinal differences. In many parts of the country, particularly in urban areas, these and other unrecognized Protestant organizations reported that they were able to practice openly and with the knowledge of local officials. While there were exceptions, the level of official harassment of unrecognized house churches from non-SECV and ECVN denominations continued to decline across the country. The Government held discussions about registra-

tion and recognition with leaders of a number of Protestant denominations, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Attendance at religious services continued to increase during the period covered by this report. The number of Buddhist monks, Protestant pastors, and Catholic priests also continued to increase, and restrictions on church services for Protestants continued to diminish. Catholics across the country were allowed to celebrate Christmas and Easter without interference. A handful of Protestant congregations in the Central Highlands and in the north had difficulty celebrating during the Christmas season but reported that they were allowed to celebrate Easter without problems. In early 2007, IEM leaders claimed that authorities prevented their Christmas 2006 celebrations in central Quang Ngai Province. However, IEM stated that overall their operations in Southern and Central Vietnam were more stable and followers were allowed to worship regularly at 11 meeting points.

The Catholic Church reported continued easing of Government control over Church assignment of new clergy, and, many new priests were ordained. Contact between Vatican authorities and the country's Catholics was enhanced with reciprocal official visits between the Vatican and the Government. The Government maintained its regular, active dialogue with the Vatican on a range of concerns, such as diplomatic normalization, Church leadership, organizational activities, and interfaith dialogue.

At least one expatriate church group received a formal operating license from the HCMC Government in mid-2007.

France-based Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh was again permitted to return to the country in April 2007. He traveled widely through the country, met with large groups of Buddhist adherents, and spoke to intellectuals and political leaders, including President Nguyen Minh Triet.

During the reporting period, some religious groups were also allowed to convene large religious gatherings, such as the Catholic celebrations at the La Vang Catholic sanctuary, traditional pilgrimage events such as the Hung Kings' Festival, Buddhist ceremonies in Hue, and the Hoa Hao Founding Day and commemoration of the founder's death, each with attendance estimated in the tens of thousands or more. House church Protestants were able to gather in large groups for special worship services in Ho Chi Minh City and elsewhere. Ho Chi Minh City officials also facilitated large Christmas and Easter celebrations by a variety of Protestant denominations.

Catholic and Protestant groups reported that the Government continued to restore some previously owned properties, although progress on outstanding claims was generally very slow.

In January 2006 an ECVN congregation was given title to a church property in Thanh Hoa that had stood derelict for several decades. The congregation was also given permission to remodel the church and build a house for their pastor.

The Government continued to publicize its new policy of religious tolerance through the organs of the state. The CRA continued to train more provincial propaganda cadres from the Northwest Highlands to disseminate information on religion to reduce societal tensions arising between followers of traditional ethnic minority beliefs and Protestant converts.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no known instances of societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the period covered by this report. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, there were some ecumenical dialogues among leaders of disparate religious communities. Catholics, Buddhists, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai sometimes cooperate on social and charitable projects.

On November 19, 2006, the Catholic Archdiocese of Hanoi and the ECVN held an historic ecumenical service at Cua Bac Church in Hanoi on the occasion of the visit of President Bush. New cooperative efforts between the two groups resulted from this effort.

The growth of Protestantism in the Central Highlands is complicated by the presence of "Dega" separatists, who advocate an autonomous or independent homeland for the indigenous persons who live in the area, particularly in Gia Lai, Dak Nong, and Dak Lak provinces. These separatists are reported to have links to political advocacy groups residing in the United States. The relationship between the Dega movement and Protestant believers belonging to the SECV is tense in some parts of the Central Highlands. Dega activists reportedly have threatened that SECV pastors would not be allowed to serve in a "Dega State" unless they abandon the SECV. Other Protestant pastors have accused the Dega movement of manipulating religion for political purposes.

In a widely publicized case during the reporting period, vandals, who turned out to be local Party officials and policemen, destroyed a Pieta statue in Dong Dinh Parish, Nho Quan District, in Ninh Binh Province. This was largely related to a local political dispute. Provincial authorities responded quickly to the vandalism, and 10 local Party officials were arrested, relieved of duty, and ordered to pay restitution to the Catholic Phat Diem Diocese. The local Bishop refused the financial restitution, but the statue was later restored in May 2007 with donations from local Catholics. Such anti-Catholic incidents were relatively rare.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

In August 2006 the U.S. Department of State's Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom traveled to the country to meet religious leaders and Government authorities.

In November 2006, in recognition of its "improvements towards advancing religious freedom" in the last 2 years, the U.S. Department of State lifted the country's designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for Religious Freedom Violations. As defined under the International Religious Freedom Act, the U.S. Department of State found that the country no longer fit the criteria of a "severe violator of religious freedom."

On November 19, 2006, President Bush attended a historic ecumenical service at a Catholic Church in Hanoi. On November 20, 2006, on the margins of the APEC meetings in Hanoi, the Secretary of State held a private meeting with religious leaders at the U.S. Ambassador's residence.

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the consulate general in Ho Chi Minh City actively and regularly raised concerns about religious freedom with a wide variety of Communist Party leaders and Government officials, including authorities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, and other offices in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and the provinces. The mission also maintained regular contact with religious leaders and dissidents.

The U.S. Ambassador, the consul general in Ho Chi Minh City, and other Embassy and consulate officers raised religious freedom matters with senior cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister, the two Deputy Prime Ministers, the Foreign Minister, other senior Government officials, the head of the Committee on Religious Affairs, Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Public Security, officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' External Relations Office in Ho Chi Minh City, chairpersons of Provincial People's Committees around the country, and other officials, particularly in the Central and Northwest Highlands. Embassy and consulate officials maintained regular contact with the key Government offices responsible for respect for human rights. Embassy and consulate officers repeatedly informed Government officials that progress on religious freedom and human rights was critical to an improved bilateral relationship.

Mission officers urged recognition of a broad spectrum of religious groups, including members of the UBCV, Protestant house churches, and dissenting Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. They urged greater freedom for recognized religious groups. Mission officers repeatedly advocated ending restrictions on Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do, among others. The Ambassador also requested that the Government investigate alleged abuses of religious believers and punish any officials found to be responsible. Mission officers, along with the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, continued to urge a complete end to forced renunciations and the punishment of officials involved, asked for the release of religious and political prisoners, and called for the registration and reopening of house churches that had been closed.

Embassy officers and other U.S. Government officials repeatedly raised the case of Ma Van Bay with the Government through dissemination of an official list of prisoners of concern. The Government released Ma Van Bay as part of the National Day amnesty in September 2006.

Representatives of the Embassy and the consulate general had frequent contact with leaders of major religious communities, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Muslims. In April 2007 the consul general and a State Department deputy assistant secretary met with Thich Quang Do. Consulate officers maintained regular contact with Do and other UBCV-affiliated monks. Embassy and consulate officers met with the Cardinal of Ho Chi Minh City, the Catholic archbishops of Hue and Hanoi, and the bishops of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kontum, Can Tho, Lang Son, Buon Ma Thuot, and Haiphong, as well as other members of the Episcopal Conference. Embassy and consulate officers also met repeatedly with leaders of the SECV, ECVN, and various Protestant house churches and with leaders of the Muslim community. When traveling outside of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh

City, Embassy and Consulate General officers regularly met with provincial religious affairs committees, village elders, local clergy, and believers. Mission officers continued to encourage and monitor implementation of the Government's legal framework on religion, on a regular basis, at the national, provincial, and local levels.

EUROPE AND EURASIA

ALBANIA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious beliefs or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to urge the Government to address religious property claims and return buildings, land, and other property to religious groups that lost them under Communist rule.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,100 square miles and a population of 3.6 million. No reliable data were available on active participation in formal religious services, but estimates range from 25 to 40 percent. Despite such secularism, most citizens associate themselves with a traditional religious group. Citizens of Muslim background make up the largest traditional religious group (65 to 70 percent of the population) and are divided into two major 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). Bektashis are estimated to represent 25 percent of the 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 10 percent to Catholic communities.

Muslims are found throughout the country, while Orthodox followers are concentrated in the south and Catholics in the north. However, this division is not strict, particularly in many urban centers, which have mixed populations. Members of the Greek minority, concentrated in the south, belong almost exclusively to the Orthodox Church. In addition to the four traditional religious groups, there are substantial numbers of followers of Protestant denominations, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and other religious groups.

The State Committee on Cults reported a total of 245 religious groups, organizations, and foundations in addition to the 4 traditional faiths. This number includes 34 different Islamic organizations and 189 Protestant (Christian) organizations, mostly associated with the Albanian Evangelical Alliance (VUSH).

Missionary groups are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Government is secular. According to the Constitution, there is no official religion and all religions are equal; however, the predominant religious communities (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Catholic) enjoy a greater degree of official recognition (e.g., national holidays) and social status based on their historical presence in the country. Official holidays include holy days from all four predominant faiths.

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 registered religious groups have the right to hold bank accounts and own property. Religious movements may acquire the official status of a juridical person by registering with the Tirana District Court under the Law on Nonprofit Organizations, which recognizes the status of a nonprofit association regardless of whether the organization has a cultural, recreational, religious, or humanitarian character. All religious communities have criticized the Government for its unwillingness to grant them tax-exempt status. Since 2003 foreign religious missionaries have been exempt from the residence permit tax.

The State Committee on Cults, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth, and Sports, is charged with regulating relations between the Government and all religious communities as well as protecting freedom of religion and promoting interreligious cooperation and understanding. The committee claims that its records on religious organizations facilitate the granting of residence permits by police to foreign employees of various religious organizations. No organization claimed any difficulty in obtaining residency permits during the period covered by this report. However, as a general rule, foreign religious missionaries were issued only 1-year residency permits instead of the 5-year permits allowed by law for residents in the country more than 2 years. During the period covered by this report, the Committee began working with the Government on criteria that would allow longer-term residency permits of up to 5 years for well-established religious organizations with long-term ties to the country.

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. The Catholic Church continued to be the only religious community that had finalized such an agreement with the Government. The Committee had a mandate to negotiate agreements with the three remaining groups and created a working group in May 2006 for this purpose. The Committee reportedly reached an agreement with three groups—the Muslim, Orthodox, and Bektashi communities. VUSH, a Protestant umbrella organization, approached the Committee to negotiate a bilateral agreement but had not received a response by the end of the reporting period.

The Ministry of Education states that public schools in the country are secular and that the law prohibits ideological and religious indoctrination. Religion is not taught in public schools. No restriction is imposed on how families raise their children with respect to religious practices. According to official figures, religious communities, organizations, and foundations managed 101 educational institutions, of which 15 were officially religious-affiliated schools, with more than 2,600 students. By law the Ministry of Education must license such schools, and curriculums must comply with national education standards. The Catholic and Muslim groups operated numerous state-licensed schools and reported no problems in obtaining new licenses for new schools. The Orthodox Church and the Bektashis operated strictly religious educational centers for the training of clerics.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, restitution of property expropriated by the former Communist government continued to be a problem. According to the law on the restitution of and compensation for such properties, religious communities have the same rights as private individuals in matters of property restitution or compensation, but the religious communities questioned the law's limitation on property restitution to 150 acres. During the reporting period, the Government had not established a special fund for monetary compensation, but the Prime Minister's Office consistently attempted to resolve religious property issues. The Government also announced plans to remove bureaucratic and legalistic hurdles that hindered the return of confiscated properties by eliminating the requirement that religious organizations produce titles and deeds to prove original ownership. During the Communist era, properties confiscated by the regime generally were recorded, and the Government was working to recognize these archival documents as equivalent to property titles, thus clarifying land ownership in some cases.

All four major traditional communities had substantial property claims that remained unresolved. In cases involving the return of religious buildings, the Government often failed to return the land surrounding the buildings, sometimes because of redevelopment claims by private individuals who began farming it or using it for other purposes. The Orthodox Church continued construction of a new cathedral in

Tirana on a parcel of land that it received as compensation for other land seized by the Communist government, but it claimed a lack of action on other property claims throughout the country, as well as difficulty in recovering religious icons and precious manuscripts. Both the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church were trying to regain possession of archives seized by the Communist government and held in the national archives.

Although the Catholic Church had substantial outstanding property claims, it indicated that it was not actively pursuing these and had decided to focus its efforts in other areas. Nevertheless, if compensation were eventually to be paid out to other religious groups, it would expect to receive compensation as well.

The Albanian Islamic Community and the Bektashis also requested that the Government return a number of properties. The Islamic Community succeeded in obtaining the title to a large parcel of land in Tirana where a mosque once stood. However, it did not receive a building permit for construction of a new mosque. Under the new Urban Regulatory Plan for Tirana, another parcel of land in Tirana, also owned by the Islamic Community, had been set aside for this purpose. The Islamic Community rejected this location as too small and continued to favor the original site. The problem remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report. The Bektashi community was also seeking compensation from the Government for victims of religious maltreatment during the Communist regime.

The Orthodox Church's 1954 statute states that its archbishop must have Albanian citizenship; however, the archbishop was a Greek citizen who was seeking Albanian citizenship. During the period covered by this report, the Government did not take action on his citizenship application, submitted in 2003.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, nor were any substantial acts of vandalism reported.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to urge the Government to address religious property claims and return buildings, land, and other property to the religious groups that lost them under Communist rule. Embassy officers, including the chief of mission, met frequently with the heads of the major religious communities.

The Embassy was active in urging tolerance and moderation. The Embassy sponsored events at its American Corners geared towards high school and university students to promote interfaith understanding, including a photo exhibit and discussion on "Muslim Life in America." Using an Embassy grant, the Civic and Faith-based Education Project expanded its activities throughout the country, bringing together local authorities, teachers, students, religious leaders, and civil society representatives to discuss ways of cultivating and reinforcing civic values to contribute to a more democratic, diverse, and tolerant society. The project introduced cooperative civic education curriculums into Muslim-affiliated schools in Tirana and continued to replicate this experience in other Muslim-affiliated schools throughout the rest of the country. The project also provided in-service training for teachers at local madrassahs that agreed to include civic education as part of their curriculum. The training offered knowledge and skills for effective civic education in their schools, which could help to further strengthen the relationship between civic and faith-based education, provide students in such schools with civic knowledge and skills, and improve the climate for further cooperation between public schools and faith-based nonpublic schools.

Through a U.S. Agency for International Development project, the U.S. Government supported the peaceful coexistence of different religious groups by fostering cooperation through interaction and dialogue. The project provided religious leaders and activists the skills and techniques to resolve conflicts among members of their own faith or between religious groups, and it provided technical assistance, training, and financial assistance through small grants to implement community development projects that promote dialogue. Finally, the project supported the efforts of the State

Committee on Cults to develop agreements between the state and religious communities.

ANDORRA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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, although no direct subsidies, not available to other religious groups.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 square miles and a population of 81,200 (December 2006 figure). Few official statistics are available on religion; traditionally, approximately 90 percent of the population is Catholic. The population consists largely of immigrants from Spain, Portugal, and France, with full citizens representing less than 36 percent of the total. The immigrants are also generally Catholic. It is estimated that, of the Catholic population, half are active church attendees. Other Christian groups include 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. Other religious groups include Jews, Muslims (primarily 2,000 North African immigrants divided into two groups, one more fundamentalist) and Hindus. An estimated 100 Jews live in the country.

Foreign missionaries are active and operate without restriction.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Catholic Church "in accordance with Andorran tradition" and recognizes the "full legal capacity" of the bodies of the Catholic Church, granting them legal status "in accordance with their own rules." One of the two constitutionally designated princes of the country (who serves equally as joint head of state with the president of France) is Bishop Joan Enric Vives i 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 a national holiday.

There is no law that clearly requires legal registration and approval of religious groups and religious worship. The law of associations is very general and does not mention specifically religious organizations. 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. For example, the Government provides support to Caritas, Andorran Migrant Women's Association (ADMA), and the Andorran Women's Associations (ADA). 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 were no reports of rejected applications.

The authorities reportedly expressed concern that some methods used by religious organizations (brainwashing or physical abuse, for example) might prove injurious to public health, safety, morals, or order. These authorities questioned how they might proceed in such cases but did not mention a specific case. The law does not limit any such groups, although it does contain a provision that no one may be "forced to join or remain in an association against his/her will."

In spite of negotiations for some years between the Muslim community and the Government, no mosque was built. Nevertheless, the country's 2,000 Muslims have

"prayer spaces" and there appear to be no restrictions on the number of these places of worship scattered throughout the country.

Instruction in the tenets of the Catholic faith is available in public schools on an optional basis, outside of both regular school hours and the time frame set aside for elective school activities, such as civics or ethics. The Catholic Church provides teachers for religion classes, and the Government pays their salaries. The Islamic Cultural Center provided approximately 50 students with Arabic lessons. The Government and the Moroccan community had not yet agreed upon a system that would allow children to receive Arabic classes in school outside of the regular school day. The Government was willing to offer Arabic classes, but the Muslim community had not been able to find an imam to teach. The Ombudsman received no complaints from the Muslim community on this issue.

On occasion the Government made public facilities available to various religious organizations for religious activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Societal attitudes among religious groups appeared 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 practiced religions other than Catholicism tend to be immigrants and otherwise not integrated fully into the local community, there appeared to be few or no obstacles to their practicing their own 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 and religious freedom.

ARMENIA

The Constitution as amended in December 2005 provides for freedom of religion; however, the law places some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of minority religious groups, 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 other religious groups.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Some denominations reported occasional discrimination by mid- or low-level Government officials but found high-level officials to be tolerant. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that judges sentenced them to longer prison terms for evasion of alternative military service than in the past, although the sentences were still within the range allowed by law.

Societal attitudes toward some minority religious groups were ambivalent, and there were reports of societal discrimination directed against members of these groups.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,500 square miles and a population of 3 million.

Approximately 98 percent of the population is ethnic Armenian. As a result of Soviet-era policies, the number of active religious practitioners is relatively low, but the link between Armenian ethnicity and the Armenian Church is strong. An estimated 90 percent of citizens nominally belong to the Armenian Church, an inde-

pendent Eastern Christian denomination with its spiritual center at the Etchmiadzin cathedral and monastery. The head of the church is Catholicos Garegin (Karekin) II.

There are small communities of other religious groups. There was no reliable census data on religious minorities, and estimates from congregants varied significantly. The Catholic Church, both Roman and Mekhitarist (Armenian Uniate), estimated 120,000 followers. The Jehovah's Witnesses estimated their membership at 9,000. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Yezidis, an ethnic Kurd cultural group whose religion includes elements derived from Zoroastrianism, Islam, and animism; unspecified "charismatic" Christians; the Armenian Evangelical Church; Molokans, an ethnic Russian pacifist Christian group that split from the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th-century; Baptists; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); Orthodox Christians; Seventh-day Adventists; Pentecostals; Jews; and Baha'is. Levels of membership in minority religious groups remained relatively unchanged. There was no estimate of the number of atheists.

Yezidis are concentrated primarily in agricultural areas around Mount Aragats, northwest of the capital Yerevan. Armenian Catholics live mainly in the northern region, while most Jews, Mormons, Baha'is, and Orthodox Christians reside in Yerevan. In Yerevan there is also a small community of Muslims, including Kurds, Iranians, and temporary residents from the Middle East.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution as amended in 2005 provides for freedom of religion and the right to practice, choose, or change religious belief. It recognizes "the exclusive mission of the Armenian Church as a national church in the spiritual life, development of the national culture, and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia." The law places some restrictions on the religious freedom of religious groups other than the Armenian Church. The Law on Freedom of Conscience establishes the separation of church and state but grants the Armenian Church official status as the national church.

Extended negotiations between the Government and the Armenian Church resulted in a 2000 framework for the two sides to negotiate a concordat. The negotiations resulted in the signing of a law March 14, 2007, that codified the church's role.

The law establishes confessor-penitent confidentiality, makes the church's marriage rite legally binding, and assigns the church and the state joint responsibility to preserve national historic churches. The law does not grant the church tax-exempt status or establish any state funding for the church. The law formally recognizes the role that the Armenian Church already plays in society, since most citizens see the church as an integral part of national identity, history, and cultural heritage. January 6, the day on which the Armenian Church celebrates Christmas, is a national holiday.

The law does not mandate registration of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious groups; however, only registered organizations have legal status. Only registered groups may publish newspapers or magazines, rent meeting places, broadcast programs on television or radio, or officially sponsor the visas of visitors, although there is no prohibition on individual members doing so. There were no reports of the Government refusing registration to religious groups that qualified for registration under the law. To qualify for registration, religious organizations must "be free from materialism and of a purely spiritual nature," and must subscribe to a doctrine based on "historically recognized holy scriptures." The Office of the State Registrar registers religious entities. The Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities oversees religious affairs and performs a consultative role in the registration process. A religious organization must have at least 200 adult members to register. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had registered 63 religious organizations, including individual congregations within the same denomination.

According to the Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities, some minority religious groups, including the Molokans and some Yezidi groups, have not sought registration. Although it was not registered as a religious facility, Yerevan's sole mosque was open for regular Friday prayers, and the Government did not restrict Muslims from praying there.

The Law on Education mandates that public schools offer a secular education but does not prohibit religious education in state schools. Only personnel authorized and trained by the Government may teach in public schools. Classes in religious history

are part of the public school curriculum and are taught by teachers. The history of the Armenian Church is the basis of this curriculum; many schools teach about world religions in elementary school and the history of the Armenian Church in middle school. Religious groups may not provide religious instruction in schools, although registered groups may do so in private homes to children of their members. The use of public school buildings for religious "indoctrination" is illegal.

The law on alternative military service allows conscientious objectors, subject to Government panel approval, to perform either noncombatant military or civilian service duties rather than serve as combat-trained military personnel. The law took effect in 2004 and applied to subsequent draftees and those serving prison terms for draft evasion. An amendment to the law on military service that took effect in January 2006 criminalizes evasion of alternative labor service. Conscientious objectors maintained, however, that military control of the alternative labor service amounted to unacceptable military service.

The military employs Armenian Church chaplains for each division, but no other religious groups are represented in the military chaplaincy. The Armenian Church runs a prison ministry program but does not have permanent representatives in prisons. The Armenian Evangelical Church has chaplains in seven prisons.

The Government's human rights ombudsman and the head of the Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities met with minority religious organizations during the reporting period.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The law places some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of minority religious groups, and there were some restrictions in practice.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience prohibits "proselytizing" but does not define it. The prohibition applies to all groups, including the Armenian Church. Most registered religious groups reported no serious legal impediments to their activities during the reporting period.

Although the law prohibits foreign funding of foreign-based denominations, the Government did not enforce the ban and considered it unenforceable.

During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists reported that low-level Government officials denied them the use of public space for religious gatherings. However, the Jehovah's Witnesses noted that, in general, they were free to assemble without harassment by police or other Government entities.

A customs issue pertaining to the Jehovah's Witnesses ability to obtain shipments of religious literature was not resolved at the end of the reporting period. On March 29, 2007, customs officials in Yerevan reevaluated a shipment of religious periodicals received by the Jehovah's Witnesses at a significantly higher rate than the group expected, making it financially difficult for them to arrange clearance of the shipment. Customs officials maintained that the reevaluation complied with the customs code.

At the end of the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that following complaints to high-ranking officials, the military commissariat had issued certificates of registration (necessary for obtaining passports) to the majority of a group of Witnesses who had completed prison sentences for conscientious objection to military service.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses in Yerevan, as of the end of the reporting period, 69 Witnesses remained in prison for refusal, on conscientious and religious grounds, to perform military service or alternative labor service. Two additional members were awaiting trial. Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses stated that all of the prisoners were given the opportunity to serve an alternative to military service rather than prison time, but that all refused because the military retained administrative control of alternative service.

Jehovah's Witnesses complained that the courts handed down tougher sentences for evasion of alternative labor service during the reporting period. In the period covered by this report, of the 48 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced, 24 received 30-month sentences and 5 received 36-month sentences, the maximum allowed by law. Of the remaining 19 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced during the reporting period, 15 received sentences ranging between 22 and 27 months, and 4 received 18-month sentences. Of 36 Jehovah's Witnesses convicted during the previous reporting period, only 1 received a 30-month sentence, and none received 36-month sentences; the majority were sentenced to either 18 or 24 months of imprisonment.

Unlike during the previous reporting period, there were no reports that military hazing of new conscripts was more severe for minority group members. Yezidi representatives reported no harassment or discrimination.

During the reporting period there was no reported officially sponsored violence against minority religious groups. Other than Jehovah's Witnesses who were conscientious objectors, there were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

Nineteen Jehovah's Witnesses who had begun and then abandoned alternative military service were acquitted, and criminal proceedings against them were terminated by a decision of the Prosecutor General on September 12, 2006. The individuals were charged with desertion or absence without leave. Seven of the 19 had been in pretrial detention or agreed not to leave the country before their trials at the time of their acquittal. The others had received sentences ranging from 2 to 3 years in prison and served between 5 and 9 months of their sentences.

On October 27, 2006, Yerevan's Holocaust memorial, which had been inexplicably vandalized earlier in the year, was replaced and rededicated to the memory of both Jews and Armenians who had been the victims of "heinous crimes." A gesture of respect and national empathy, the memorial was erected with the cooperation of international donors, the Jewish community, Armenian Diaspora organizations, and the Government.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Societal attitudes toward most minority religious groups were ambivalent. Many citizens are not religiously observant, but the link between Armenian ethnicity and the Armenian Church is strong.

According to some observers, the general population expressed negative attitudes about Jehovah's Witnesses because the latter refused to serve in the military, engaged in little-understood proselytizing practices, and because of a widespread but unsubstantiated belief that they pay the desperately poor to convert. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to be targets of hostile sermons by some Armenian Church clerics and experienced occasional societal discrimination. Unlike in the previous reporting period, the press did not report complaints of allegedly illegal proselytizing lodged by citizens against members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On June 1, 2007, in the village of Lusarat, a passing Armenian Apostolic priest verbally harassed and assaulted two Jehovah's Witnesses having a Bible discussion with a woman in the central square. While the Witnesses agreed to drop assault charges pending the priest's apology, none was forthcoming. Police closed the case for lack of evidence after the priest denied the incident.

Two Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with local police after they were allegedly threatened by a man with a pistol while they engaged in public ministry on April 15, 2007. Police did not investigate the incident, citing lack of evidence.

At the end of the reporting period, a Witness dropped his case against a co-worker who had attacked him. Police had taken no action on the matter. On March 29, 2007, the co-worker had attempted to choke the Witness at their place of work after discovering that the latter was a member of the religious group.

The group also reported that an Armenian Church priest assaulted two female Jehovah's Witnesses on August 21, 2006. According to the group, one of the victims suffered a broken arm. Police refused to initiate an investigation, in part because the priest expressed remorse, and the women were unable to appeal the decision.

In isolated incidents, some members of the press stoked suspicion of "nontraditional" religious organizations. On February 14, 2007, online news source *Panorama* published an article based on an e-mail from a reader that accused several famous Armenian singers and a television commentator of being "followers of religious sects." On February 13, 2007, online news source *A1+* published an article warning readers about "false Bibles" distributed by "sectarian organizations."

The Jewish community reported no incidents of verbal harassment during the reporting period. In the summer and fall of 2006, a number of spray-painted swastikas of unknown origin, accompanied by the words "No Arabs," "Sieg Heil," and "Russians out of our country," were observed on kiosks and construction site walls in downtown Yerevan; the symbols appeared to express general xenophobia.

SECTION IV. U.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 these discussions, the U.S. Government emphasized to authorities that continued eligibility for the $235 million (approximately 79 billion AMD) Millennium Challenge Compact remained contingent upon the Government's performance in meeting good governance indicators, which include standards of respect for religious freedom. Embassy officials maintained close contact with the Catholicos at Etchmiadzin and with leaders of other religious and ecumenical groups in the country. The Embassy maintained regular contact with resident and visiting regional representatives of foreign-based religious groups such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Baha'is, and raised their concerns with the Government when necessary. Embassy officials closely monitored trials related to issues of religious freedom and took an active role in policy forums and NGO roundtables regarding religious freedom.

Leaders of local minority religious groups were regularly welcomed at Embassy events.

AUSTRIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice for all but a minority of religious groups.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the free practice of religion for all but those religions termed "sects."

There was a report of an anti-Semitic physical attack against a person and a violent anti-Semitic attack against property. Other anti-Semitic incidents occurred during the year. There was some societal mistrust and discrimination against members of some nonrecognized religious groups, particularly those referred to as "sects." During 2006 there were 32 cases of discrimination based on religion brought before the Equal Rights Commissioner. Muslims also reported prejudice, particularly with regard to headscarves and Muslim cemeteries.

There was no marked deterioration in the atmosphere of religious tolerance in the country during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 32,369 square miles and a population of 8.2 million. The largest minority groups are Croatian, Slovene, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, and Roma. In past years the country experienced some immigration from countries such as Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which increased the number of Muslims in the country. The Muslim community has more than doubled since 1991 to an estimated 339,000, or 4.2 percent of the population. In recent years immigration has slowed down due to the introduction of a quota system in the late 1990s. By far the largest ethnic group is Turkish, of which 123,000 have Turkish citizenship. Many more ethnic Turks are Austrian citizens. The next largest groups are Bosnians with 64,600, Yugoslavians with 21,600, Macedonians with 11,000, and Iranians with 3,800. The largest groups of Arab Muslims are Egyptians with 3,500 and Tunisians with 1,000.

According to the most recent census in 2001, membership in major religions is as follows: Roman Catholic Church, 74 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; and other non-Christian religious groups, 0.2 percent. Atheists account for 12 percent, and 2 percent do not indicate a religious affiliation.

The vast majority of groups termed "sects" by the Government are small organizations with fewer than 100 members. There was a report of a physical attack against a person and a violent attack against property. Among the larger groups is the Church of Scientology, with between 5,000 and 6,000 members, and the Unification Church, with approximately 700 adherents. Other groups termed "sects" include Divine Light Mission, Eckankar, Hare Krishna, the Holosophic Community, the Osho Movement, Sahaja Yoga, Sai Baba, Sri Chinmoy, Transcendental Meditation, Center for Experimental Society Formation, Fiat Lux, Universal Life, and The Family.

The provinces of Carinthia and Burgenland have somewhat higher percentages of Protestants than the national average. The number of Muslims is higher than the national average in Vienna (7.8 percent) and the province of Vorarlberg (8.4 percent), where industry draws a disproportionately higher number of guest workers from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia.

According to a poll by FESSEL–GfK, 78 percent of respondents state that they belong to a church or religious group. Of that number, 2 percent attend services more than once a week, 15 percent attend weekly, 17 percent attend a minimum of once a month, 34 percent attend several times a year (on special occasions), and 32 percent never attend.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice, except for religious groups that receive second-class status (or no status) under the 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities. Some of these groups are termed "sects." One group that has gone to court over its treatment is the Jehovah's Witnesses, which has taken its case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The Church of Scientology is also denied acknowledgement as a religious group.

The Government is secular. The Roman Catholic Church is the predominant religion; many 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 are divided into three legal categories (listed in descending order of status): Officially recognized religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. Each category of organizations possesses a distinct set of rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

Recognition as a religious society under the 1874 law has wide-ranging implications, such as the authority to participate in the mandatory church contributions program, to provide religious instruction in public schools, and to bring religious workers into the country to act as ministers, missionaries, or teachers. Under the 1874 law, religious societies have "public corporation" status. This status permits religious societies to engage in a number of public or quasi-public activities that are denied to confessional communities and associations. The Government provides financial support for religious teachers at both public and private schools to religious societies but not to other religious organizations. The Government provides financial support to private schools run by any of the 13 officially recognized religious societies: the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant churches (Lutheran and Presbyterian, called "Augsburger" and "Helvetic" confessions), Islamic community, Old Catholic Church, Jewish community, Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), New Apostolic Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Methodist Church of Austria, Buddhist community, and Coptic Orthodox Church.

The 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities imposed new criteria on religious groups to achieve religious society status, although it allowed previously recognized societies to retain their status. New criteria included a 20-year period of existence (at least 10 of which must be as a group organized as a confessional community under the 1998 law) and membership equaling at least two one-thousandths of the country's population (approximately 16,000 persons). Only 4 of the 13 recognized religious (Catholic, Protestant, Islamic Community, and Eastern Orthodox) groups meet this membership requirement. Of the unrecognized religious groups, only the Jehovah's Witnesses 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. On June 8–9, 2005, several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) at the Organization

for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) meeting on Anti-Semitism and on Other Forms of Intolerance concluded that "the existing system and in particular the 1998 Law on Confessional Communities is inherently discriminatory as it *de facto* prevents religious organizations from obtaining a state-recognized status and relegates them to a second-class status."

Once the Government recognizes them, religious confessional communities have juridical standing, which permits them to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in their own names and contracting for goods and services. A religious group that seeks to obtain this new status is subject to a 6-month waiting period from the time of application to the Ministry of Education and Culture. According to the Ministry, as of June 2007, 14 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. Since then, its decision has been upheld in the Constitutional Court and the Administrative Court. Following a May 2006 decree by the Ministry of Education, the ELAIA Christian Community (ELAIA Christengemeinde) also received status as confessional community after applying on October 13, 2005.

The 11 religious groups that constitute confessional communities according to the law are the Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'i Faith, the Baptists, Evangelical Alliance, the Movement for Religious Renewal, Free Christian Community (Pentecostalists), Pentecostal Community of God, ELAIA Christian Community, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindu Religious Community, and 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. Historically, unrecognized religious groups had problems obtaining resident permits for foreign religious workers. Unlike visas for religious workers of recognized religions, religious workers who are members of unrecognized religions are subject to a numerical cap for what is technically a nonpreference immigrant visa category. Administrative procedures adopted in 1997 for certain unrecognized groups, which exempt these workers from having to obtain governmental permission to work, helped to address this problem in part. These procedures allowed for application under an immigrant visa category that is neither employment nor family-based. New visa laws that became effective in January 2006 brought certain changes in the implementation for a number of visa categories. New poverty guidelines and shortened visa validity periods make it more difficult for some members of this group to obtain resident permits.

The Government provides funding for religious instruction in public schools and places of worship for children belonging to any of the 13 officially recognized religious societies. The Government does not offer such funding to nonrecognized religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. In some cases, religious societies decide that the administrative cost of providing religious instruction is too great to warrant providing such courses in all schools. Attendance in religious instruction is mandatory and instruction either takes place in the school or at sites organized by the religious groups. Unless students formally withdraw at the beginning of the academic year, students under the age of 14 need parental permission to withdraw from instruction.

The country has a law banning Holocaust denial. Due to the country's history during the National Socialist era, there is strong opposition to relaxing the law banning Holocaust denial.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Several religious groups that the Government did not recognize under the 1998 law, as well as some religious law experts, dismiss the benefits of obtaining status under the 1998 law and have complained that the law's additional criteria for recognition as a religious society obstructs recognition, and formalizes a second-class status for nonrecognized groups.

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 in 1997 under the 1874 law. A complaint filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses with the ECHR in 1998, arguing that the group had not yet been granted full status as a religious entity in the country under the law despite a two-decade struggle, remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. This was one of three applications that the Religious Community of Jehovah's Witnesses filed

against the Government at the ECHR. Three other applications were filed by individuals and dealt with the denial of exemption for the ministers of Jehovah's Witnesses from both military and alternative service. On February 1, 2005, the ECHR ruled that two of the cases dealing with military exemption were admissible as possible violations of the European Convention on Human Rights regarding freedom of religion and discrimination. On November 16, 2006, the Jehovah's Witnesses filed an application with the ECHR regarding aspects of the Law on Confessional Communities which does not allow for religious societies to receive tax concessions. The application was filed with the ECHR after the Constitutional Court and the Administrative Court dismissed the case. These cases were pending before the courts.

The State of Lower Austria and the City of Vienna fund a counseling center of the Society Against Sect and Cult Dangers (GSK), a controversial quasi-NGO, which actively works against sects and cults. In 2005 GSK received an average of $29,260 (€22,000) annually from the Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations, and $24,166 (€18,170) annually from the City Government of Vienna. However, after 2005, GSK stopped receiving federal funding due to Government cuts. 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. Several states fund offices that provide information on sects and cults.

The Federal Office of Sect Issues continued 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 Health, Family, and Youth appoints and supervises its head.

The conservative People's Party (OVP) position regarding membership in a "sect" remained in force during the period covered by this report. The Party's stated position is that party membership is incompatible with membership in a "sect" if the sect holds a fundamentally different view of man from what the Party believes, advocates opinions irreconcilable with the ethical principles of the party, or rejects the basic rights granted by progressively minded constitutional states and an open society. In 1998 the OVP passed a resolution banning members of "sects" from being members of the party. This resolution was passed to target a native Scientologist who was at the time a respected member of his local party organization and his local community. There were no known reports of members of other sects being denied membership in the party.

On April 21, 2007, the press found a flier with the logo of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPOe), alongside the logos of neo-Nazi organizations which were promoting xenophobic attitudes. The BBC reported that the FPOe hosted several rightwing European parties, including representatives from the French Front National, the Belgian Ulaams Belang, and the German "Pro Koeln" party. The meeting focused on "foreign infiltration." How much influence such parties have on public attitudes toward observant Muslims or the Jewish community or reflect common attitudes of the general public towards minority religious groups was difficult to determine.

Prisoners who belong to nonrecognized religious groups are entitled to pastoral care. Some evangelical groups have reported experiencing problems with access to pastoral care in isolated instances; however, there were no allegations of widespread problems.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The NGO Forum against Anti-Semitism reported 125 anti-Semitic incidents in 2006, including one physical attack. The incidents also included name-calling, graffiti/defacement, threats, anti-Semitic Internet postings, property damage, vilifying letters, and telephone calls.

On February 7, 2007, a court sentenced a 30-year-old Croatian immigrant to 15 months in prison for the November 26, 2006, destructive rampage against the Lauder Chabad School in Vienna. No one was present or injured, but a leader in the Jewish community said that the extent of the damage made this incident "the most serious in the last 20 years." Upon his arrest, the man referred to himself as "Adolf Hitler" and in the courtroom said there were too many Jews in the country.

The European Union's Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia has declared in the past that anti-Semitism in the country was typically characterized by diffuse and traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes rather than by acts of physical aggression.

The Government strictly enforces its anti-neo-Nazi legislation, which prohibits neo-Nazi acts, including Holocaust denial, incitement to neo-Nazi activity and the glorification of National Socialism. On December 22, 2006, British historian David Irving was deported to Great Britain. On February 20, 2006, he had been found guilty of denying the existence of gas chambers at Auschwitz and sentenced to 3 years in prison.

The Government provided police protection for Jewish community institutions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There was a report of a physical attack against a person and a violent attack against property (see Anti-Semitism). There was no reported vigilante action against members of religious minorities. However, some societal mistrust and discrimination continued against members of some unrecognized religious groups, particularly against those considered to be members of sects. A large portion of the public perceived such groups as exploiting the vulnerable for monetary gain, recruiting and brainwashing youth, promoting antidemocratic ideologies, and denying the legitimacy of Government authority. There were occasional television/radio shows and reports featuring victims, or relatives and friends of such victims, who claimed to be exploited by a group termed a "sect," or a Satanic or esoteric movement. During 2006 there were 32 cases of discrimination based on religion brought before the Equal Rights Commissioner. Some observers believed the existence of and the activities of the Federal Office of Sect Issues and similar offices at the state level foster societal discrimination against minority religious groups.

Members of groups that the Government considers to be "sects" continued to complain that the Government lacks an objective stance when dealing with them. The "sects" claimed that the Government relies too heavily on isolated cases of persons who have had negative experiences with a group, rather than speaking directly to the vast majority of members who make no complaint. Societal prejudice could also be a problem; a poll in 2006 found that 90 percent of Austrians believed sects are "inherently dangerous."

The Church of Scientology reported that individual Scientologists experienced discrimination in hiring in the private sector. Jehovah's Witnesses complained about a brochure issued by the Christian Trade Unionists that mischaracterized the Witnesses as a sect.

In a guidebook for doctors working at schools, the Jehovah's Witnesses are listed as one of the confessional communities in the country but are also listed as a sect.

Muslims complained about incidents of societal discrimination and verbal harassment. Muslim women reported difficulties in the job market when potential employers learned they wore a headscarf. In 2004 the Equal Treatment Bill that implemented the EU Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Guidelines took effect, allowing such victims to take action in court. Women who wore the headscarf also reported that they experienced harassment in public areas.

In October 2006 graffiti crosses were painted on the walls of the Muslim cemetery under construction in Vienna's Liesing district. During the campaign for the October 1, 2006, national parliamentary elections, the Islamic Community also noted anti-Islamic slogans from the rightwing Freedom Party.

Compulsory school curriculums provide 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.

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 were 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, was also active in the country.

At the end of the reporting period, construction continued on the new Islamic cemetery in Vienna's Liesing district, which was expected to be completed in late 2007. An Islamic cemetery was also scheduled to be opened in the state of Vorarlberg in late 2007.

On December 6, 2006, stories in the press and the BBC reported on a study conducted by political scientists at the University of Vienna about Muslim extremism in Vienna that found that 97 percent of young Muslims participating indicated that violence had no place in spreading Islam. On September 22, 2006, in reaction to the controversy surrounding Pope Benedict XVI's comments on Islam, the Catholic Church and the Muslim Community organized a "Day of Dialogue" in contrast to

the "Day of Wrath" proclaimed on Al Jazeera for the same day. On March 22, 2006, a new interreligious platform for tolerance was presented to the public. Billed as an "initiative for a cooperative future in Austria," the group, "Christians and Muslims," seeks to promote tolerance and respect by encouraging Christians and Muslims to learn more about each other's faiths and each other. Subsequently, Jewish representatives also joined the platform.

Holocaust education was generally taught as part of history instruction, but also was featured in other subjects under the heading "political education (civics)." Religious education classes were another forum for teaching the tenets of different religions and overall tolerance. Special teacher training seminars were available on the subject of Holocaust education. The Education Ministry also ran a program through which Holocaust survivors talked to school classes about National Socialism and the Holocaust.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Embassy monitors 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 U.S. 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 discuss the concerns of NGOs and religious communities regarding the Government's policies towards religion.

During the period covered by this report, Embassy officials regularly met with Government officials, NGOs, and leaders of religious organizations to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country. U.S. representatives repeatedly voiced their concerns to the Government on the strict requirements for religious recognition in the country.

The Embassy maintained an active dialogue with members of the Jewish and Muslim Communities, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Scientology, and other religious groups.

The Embassy highlighted religious freedom and tolerance in its programs. In 2006 two Muslims participated in the International Visitor Program: one in an individual program on women's issues, immigration, and religion, and the other in a group program entitled "Project for Young Muslim Leaders on U.S. Political, Social, and Educational Issues."

AZERBAIJAN

The Constitution provides that persons of all faiths may choose and practice their religion without restriction; however, there were some abuses and restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. Some religious groups reported delays in and denials of registration. As in previous years, there continued to be some limitations upon the ability of groups to import religious literature. Most religious groups met without Government interference; however, local authorities monitored religious services, and officials at times harassed and detained members of "nontraditional" religious groups.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. There was popular prejudice against Muslims who convert to other faiths and hostility toward groups that proselytize, particularly evangelical Christian and other 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 monitors religious freedom and maintains contact with the Government and a wide range of religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 33,774 square miles and a population of 8.5 million. There were no reliable statistics on membership in specific religious groups; however, according to official figures approximately 96 percent of the population is Muslim. The remainder of the population consists mostly of Russian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Jews, and nonbelievers. Among the Muslim majority, religious ob-

servance is relatively low, and Muslim identity tends to be based more on culture and ethnicity than religion. According to the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA), the Muslim population is approximately 65 percent Shi'a and 35 percent Sunni; traditionally, differences are not defined sharply.

The vast majority of Christians are Russian Orthodox whose identity, like that of Muslims, tends to be based as much on culture and ethnicity as religion. Christians were concentrated in the urban areas of Baku, the capital, and Sumgayit.

Of a total Jewish population of approximately 15,000, the vast majority live in Baku. Much smaller communities exist in Guba and elsewhere. There are five to six rabbis and six synagogues in the country.

Shi'a, Sunni, Russian Orthodox, and Jews are considered to be the country's "traditional" religious groups. Small congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Molokans (Russian Orthodox Old Believers), Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'is have been present for more than 100 years.

In the last decade, a number of religious groups considered foreign or "nontraditional" have established a presence, including "Wahhabi" Muslims, Pentecostal and evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hare Krishnas.

There were significant expatriate Christian and Muslim communities in Baku; authorities generally permitted 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 establish the religious group of his or her choice, and to practice his or her religion. The law on religious freedom expressly prohibits the Government from interfering in the religious activities of any individual or group; however, there are exceptions, including cases where the activity of a religious group "threatens public order and stability."

A number of legal provisions enable the Government to regulate religious groups, including a requirement in the law on religious freedom that religious organizations, including individual congregations of a denomination, be registered by the Government. Registration enables a religious organization to maintain a bank account, rent property, and generally act as a legal entity.

Since 2001 religious groups must register with the SCWRA. The SCWRA has broad powers over registration and the publication, import, and distribution of religious literature, and it may suspend the activities of religious groups who violate the law.

Registration is burdensome, and there were frequent, sometimes lengthy, delays in obtaining registration. Some groups characterized the seven-step application process as arbitrary and restrictive. Unregistered organizations are vulnerable to allegations that they are illegal and as a result subject to attacks and closures by local authorities; they found it difficult, but not impossible, to function.

According to the SCWRA, it registered 48 new groups from May 2006 through June 2007 and did not reject any applications. All of the newly registered groups were Muslim communities. The SCWRA reported 392 total registered religious communities in the country.

During the reporting period, several groups asserted that the SCWRA sometimes failed to rule on registration applications in a timely manner, and some groups complained that the SCWRA or local officials selectively made the application process difficult or impossible for "nontraditional" communities. Religious groups are permitted to appeal registration denials to the courts. However, some Christian groups contended that local judges often were biased against Christian churches and were unlikely to rule in a just manner.

Under the law on religious freedom, political parties cannot engage in religious activity, and religious leaders are forbidden from seeking public office. Religious facilities may not be used for political purposes.

The law on religious freedom, which the Government enforces, prohibits foreigners from proselytizing.

Registered Muslim organizations are subordinate to the Caucasian Muslim Board (CMB), a Soviet-era muftiate that appoints Muslim clerics to mosques, periodically monitors sermons, and organizes annual pilgrimages to Mecca. Muslim religious groups must receive a letter of approval from the CMB before they can be registered by the SCWRA. Some Muslim religious leaders objected to interference from both the CMB and the SCWRA.

Religious instruction is not mandatory, and there is no religious curriculum for public elementary and high schools; however, there is no restriction on teaching religion in public schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the reporting period the Government restricted some religious freedoms.

The SCWRA continued to delay or deny registration to a number of Protestant Christian groups. Local or SCWRA officials often raised particular obstacles to Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of Assemblies of God who attempted to register, worship, or perform alternative civilian service as conscientious objectors.

Of the five main Baptist churches, three have successfully reregistered; however, during the reporting period the SCWRA again rejected the applications of the Baptist churches in Aliabad (which has sought registration for 15 years) and Neftchala. Baptists stated the Aliabad notary refused to review the community's registration documents.

In December 2006 SCWRA officials reportedly told the Assembly of God community in Baku that it would have to give the SCWRA advance notice of meetings in order to be registered. The Assemblies of God reported that they tried to register their churches in Baku and Sumgayit several times—most recently in January 2007—but did not receive a response from the SCWRA. An Assembly of God representative met with SCWRA officials in May and June 2007 to advance the registration process, but the SCWRA said that it was still examining the application. In June police also interfered in one of the church's gatherings in Baku.

The Juma Mosque has remained closed since June 2004; the mosque's imam was still not allowed to travel abroad at the end of the reporting period.

In May 2007 SCWRA head Hidayat Orujov stated that only 9 of 49 mosques in Guba were registered. Local commentators reported that Salafists were particularly active in the country's northern regions of Guba and Kachmaz.

The law on religious freedom expressly prohibits religious proselytizing by foreigners, and the Government strictly enforced this. The Government was concerned about Islamic missionary groups (predominantly Iranian and Wahhabi) operating in the country and, as in previous years, restricted their activities.

Some Muslims complained about the SCWRA's allegedly indiscriminate use of the term "Wahhabi" to cast a shadow on devout Muslims. Local Protestant Christians also claimed that SCWRA Chairman Orujov derogatorily referred to their organizations as "sects."

In May 2007 a Baku court sentenced a journalist and the editor of the *Sanat* newspaper on charges of "inciting religious hatred." The journalist was given a 3-year prison term, and the editor was given a 4-year term. The journalist had written an article, published in November 2006, arguing Islamic values retarded the country's development.

The law permits the production and dissemination of religious literature with the approval of the SCWRA; however, authorities appeared to selectively restrict the import and distribution of religious materials. Obtaining permission to import religious literature remained burdensome, and both Islamic and Christian groups have complained about the lengthy process. However, the SCWRA has also facilitated the import of some literature, and the process appeared to be selectively improving.

During the reporting period, there were multiple episodes of police confiscating allegedly radical Islamic literature in several areas of the country.

The Government regulates travel for the purpose of religious training. Prospective travelers must obtain permission from, or register with, the SCWRA or the Ministry of Education to go abroad for religious studies.

No religious identification is required in passports or other identity documents. However, the Center for the Protection of Conscience and Religious Freedom reported that authorities prohibited Muslim women from wearing headscarves in passport photos and other official identity documents.

Some local officials continued to discourage Muslim women from wearing headscarves in schools.

In July 2006 a Baku court gave Mushfiq Mammedov, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, a 6-month suspended prison sentence for refusing to fulfill his military service requirement on the grounds of religious belief. Mammedov had appealed his April 2006 arrest on grounds that he had a constitutional right to substitute alternative civilian service as a conscientious objector; a new hearing date had not been set by the end of the reporting period. However, in 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that while the country remained in a state of war with Armenia, the military service requirement superseded an individual's constitutional entitlement to alternative service due to religious beliefs and that, absent implementing regulations, the military was not obligated to provide alternative service.

Press reports indicated that the Armenian Apostolic Church enjoyed a special status in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The largely Muslim, ethnic Azerbaijani population in Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven occupied territories had fled the region during the conflict with Armenia in the 1990s and remained unable to return to these areas.

During the reporting period, there were several incidents of police arresting Wahhabis and sometimes confiscating weapons and literature, particularly in the northern regions of Guba, Khachmaz, Gax, and Zaqatala, according to local contacts and the press. In April 2007, for example, police detained 16 alleged radical Salafists in Khachmaz.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials continued. In many instances, abuses reflected the popular antipathy toward ethnic Azerbaijanis who convert to "nontraditional" religious groups such as evangelical Christian denominations or who adopt Salafist Islamic practices.

"Nontraditional" religious groups faced particularly acute problems operating in remote regions of the country, including the exclave of Nakhchivan. Unregistered religious groups continued to function, and there were fewer incidents than in previous years of official harassment, interruptions of religious services, or police intimidation and fines. However, such incidents continued, and there were reports of beatings during police raids.

On May 20, 2007, local police raided the meeting of a Baptist community in Aliabad and detained the pastor, Zaur Balaev. The church consists of members of the local Georgian-speaking Ingilo minority. Other church members were also briefly detained; police reportedly hit Balaev's wife on the face and may have assaulted another female member. Officials claimed the pastor resisted the police; local Baptists strongly disputed this assertion.

Baku-based Baptist leader Ilya Zenchenko said police claimed they had a court order to break up the unregistered religious community but refused to show any evidence to the congregation. Pastor Balaev's trial was scheduled to begin on July 20, 2007 in Zaqatala; Balaev remained imprisoned in Ganja at the end of the reporting period. Zenchenko said Balaev's health was not good and raised concern that the SCWRA was unwilling to investigate the circumstances of the episode. Some witnesses believed the arrest was retaliation for protests by church members against the officials' attempts to demolish a shop, subsequently destroyed on June 4, 2007, belonging to one of the members. Another member of the community was detained on May 28 and held for 8 hours; audio and videotapes and religious books were taken from his apartment.

On December 24, 2006, police, prosecutorial, and religious affairs officials, accompanied by a television crew, raided a meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Baku's Kingdom Hall. After breaking down the door, they searched the building without a warrant. Police detained the Jehovah's Witnesses and visitors and questioned them for several hours. They later expelled six foreign citizens, who were deported on grounds of allegedly having broken the law against religious proselytization. Members charged that police also confiscated congregation records, religious literature, the collection box containing approximately $350 (300 AZN), and computers, and reportedly assaulted at least two of the members during the raid.

Local law enforcement authorities occasionally monitored religious services, and some observant Christians and Muslims reportedly were singled out for searches by local law enforcement officers. Local persons claimed that authorities routinely monitored certain mosques. Baptists reported that local officials threatened to close their registered church in Ganja in winter 2006–07 if 10 persons were not present at all meetings. (The law on religious freedom requires that religious organizations have at least 10 members.)

Government authorities tried to restrict what they claimed were political and terrorist activities by Iranian and other clerics operating independently of the organized Muslim community. There were reports that the Government harassed Muslim groups based on security concerns. For example, the Human Rights Resource Center in Khachmaz reported that Wahhabis in Khachmaz were harassed because authorities suspected that all Wahhabis had links to terrorism

In April 2007 police arrested two individuals in Sumgayit on grounds of spreading information on Nurcu Islam, which is based on the teachings of a 19th-century Turkish imam and seeks to develop a greater role for Islam in society and educational institutions.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported that local authorities, particularly outside of Baku, occasionally interfered with their ability to rent public halls for religious assemblies and fined or detained overnight some of the group's members for

meeting in private homes. For example, in June 2005 police raided a gathering of approximately 200 Jehovah's Witnesses in Baku and briefly detained 29 members of the group.

During the reporting period, in the occupied region of Nagorno-Karabakh—a predominantly ethnic Armenian area over which the Government of Azerbaijan had no control—officials reportedly released jailed Baptist conscientious objector Gagik Mirzoyan and transferred him to a military unit to complete the remainder of his military service. Also in the occupied region of Nagorno-Karabakh, Jehovah's Witness and conscientious objector Areg Hovhanesyan remained in jail after being sentenced in 2005 to 4 years in prison for evading military service, a sentence he did not appeal.

There were reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country, including Baptist pastor Zaur Bazaev, who remained in Ganja prison at the end of the reporting period; Hamid Sabanov, another Baptist from Aliabad who was briefly detained for questioning in June; and Jehovah's Witness and conscientious objector Areg Hovhanesyan, who remained detained in the occupied region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Following months of repeated refusals, local officials in the Zaqatala region issued a birth certificate to Baptist parents who wished to give their son a Christian name. However, in another case local authorities in the village of Aliabad and in the Zaqatala registry office continued to refuse to register and issue a birth certificate for a Christian child since his birth in June 2006. His older brother had similarly been refused, on grounds of religion. The consequences of not having a birth recorded are serious: a child who does not officially exist cannot enroll in school or obtain health insurance. Members of the ethnic Georgian minority reported that difficulty in registering children with non-Azerbaijani names was particularly acute in this region.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were few cases of prejudice and discrimination against Jews in the country, and in the few instances of anti-Semitic activity, the Government was quick to respond. Jewish community leaders consistently remarked on their positive relationship with the Government and leaders of other religious communities. In 2004 a new Jewish community center opened in Baku with high-level Government participation.

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 indicated that they received or expected to receive their registration, were able to import religious literature, and met without Government interference.

When minority religious communities outside of Baku reported that local authorities illegally denied them registration, the SCWRA sometimes intervened on their behalf. In previous years the SCWRA took a strict approach to registration and failed to prevent local authorities from banning such communities.

During the reporting period, the Government promoted interfaith understanding. The SCWRA convened leaders of various religious communities on several occasions to resolve disputes in private and provided forums for visiting officials to discuss religious issues with religious figures. During the reporting period, the SCWRA organized several seminars, conferences, and regional meetings on religious freedom and tolerance. In April 2007 the Government cohosted with the Organization of the Islamic Conference a major international conference on the role of the media in promoting tolerance.

In May 2007 construction began on a new Jewish educational complex. Authorities also reserved one wing of a Baku school for secular and religious classes for 200 Jewish students.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. There was popular prejudice against Muslims who convert to other faiths and hostility toward groups that proselytize, particularly evangelical Christian and other missionary groups. This was accentuated by the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Hostility between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, intensified by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, remained strong. In those areas of the country controlled by Armenians, all ethnic Azerbaijanis have fled, and the mosques that had not been destroyed remained inactive. Animosity toward ethnic Armenians elsewhere in the country forced most of them to depart between 1988 and 1990, and all Armenian churches, many of which were damaged in ethnic riots that took place more than a decade ago, remained closed. As a consequence, the estimated 10,000 to 30,000 ethnic Armenians who remained were unable to attend services in their traditional places of worship.

At the end of the reporting period, Jehovah's Witnesses in Baku reported being unable to use a building they had rented for the purpose of religious meetings since signing a rental agreement in September 2006. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, local residents hired private security guards to prevent their access to the property on September 21, 2006, and local police informed the group on September 24 that they would not be able to hold meetings in the space due to residents' complaints. On April 17, 2007, four men reportedly broke into the building and attacked two Jehovah's Witnesses and property inside. The group reported that local police refused to investigate the incident despite the attackers being identified.

As in previous reporting periods, newspapers and television broadcasts depicted "nontraditional" religious groups as threats to the identity of the nation and as undermining the country's traditions of interfaith harmony, which led to local harassment.

During the reporting period, articles critical of Wahhabism and of Christian missionaries appeared in newspapers, and one television channel aired "exposes" of Christian church services.

Hostility also existed toward foreign (mostly Iranian and Wahhabi) Muslim missionary activity, which many viewed as attempts 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.

On April 11, 2007, unidentified individuals threw a burning object through the window of a newly constructed Roman Catholic church in Baku. The church's priest publicly stated that the incident was almost certainly criminal and thanked local authorities for investigating the matter.

SECTION IV. U.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 reporting period, U.S. Embassy officers conveyed concerns about the registration process and official attitudes toward "nontraditional" religious groups to the Chairman of the SCWRA. The Embassy also expressed concern about the Government's commitment to religious freedom with other members of the Government and in the press. The Embassy repeatedly conveyed objections to the censorship of religious literature.

The Ambassador and Embassy officers maintained close contact with leading Muslim, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish religious leaders and regularly met with members of unregistered religious groups in order to monitor religious freedom. Embassy officers also maintained close contact with nongovernmental organizations that addressed issues of religious freedom.

BELARUS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricted this right in practice.

Respect for religious freedom worsened during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to restrict religious freedom in accordance with the provisions of a 2002 law on religion and a 2003 concordat with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the only officially recognized Orthodox denomination. Although there is no state religion, the concordat grants the BOC privileged status. Protestants in particular attracted negative attention, presumably for their perceived links with the United States. Numerous anti-Semitic acts and attacks on religious monuments, buildings, and cemeteries occurred with little discernable response from the Government. Authorities kept many religious communities waiting as long as several years for decisions about property registration or restitution. Authorities also harassed and fined members of certain religious groups, especially those that the authorities appeared to regard as bearers of foreign cultural influence or as having a political agenda. Foreign mis-

sionaries, clergy, and humanitarian workers affiliated with churches faced many Government-imposed obstacles, including deportation and visa refusal or cancellation.

While some members of society took positive actions to promote religious freedom, instances of societal abuses and discrimination occurred, including numerous acts of vandalism and arson of religious sites, buildings, and memorials.

The U.S. Government raises religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; however, officials repeatedly turned down U.S. Government representatives' requests for meetings to discuss possible infringements.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 80,154 square miles and a population of 9,700,000. Historically it has been an area of both interaction and conflict between Belarusian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, although relations between the two groups improved during the period covered by this report. January 2007 figures from the Office of the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs (OPRRNA) showed that approximately 50 percent of Belarusians consider themselves religious. The Government claimed that of persons professing a religious faith, approximately 80 percent belong to the BOC, 14 percent identify themselves with the Catholic Church, 4 percent are members of eastern religious groups (including Muslims, Hare Krishnas, and Baha'i), and 2 percent are Protestant (including Seventh-day Adventists, Old Believers, Jehovah's Witnesses, Apostolic Christians, and Lutherans). Of those who identify themselves as Belarusian Orthodox or Roman Catholic, only 18 percent and 50 percent, respectively, regularly attend religious services. There are also adherents of the Greek Catholic Church and of Orthodox groups other than the BOC. Jewish groups claimed that between 50,000 and 70,000 persons identify themselves as Jewish. Most Jews were not religiously active.

In January 2007 OPRRNA reported 3,103 religious organizations of 25 religious confessions and denominations in the country, including 2,953 registered religious communities and 150 national and confessional organizations (monasteries, brotherhoods, missionaries, etc.). This included 1,399 Belarusian Orthodox, 493 Evangelical Christian, 440 Roman Catholic, 267 Evangelical Christian Baptist, 74 Seventh-day Adventist, 54 Full Gospel Christians, 33 Old Believer, 29 Jewish, 27 Lutheran, 26 Jehovah's Witness, 24 Muslim, 21 New Apostolic Church, 17 Progressive Judaism, 13 Greek Catholic, 9 Apostolic Christians, 6 Hare Krishnas, 5 Baha'i, 5 Christ's Church, 4 Mormon, 2 Messianic, 1 Reform Church, 1 Presbyterian, 1 Armenian Apostolic, 1 Latin Catholic, and 1 St. Jogan Church communities.

Foreign clergy and missionaries attempted to operate in the country but were subject to deportation and visa refusal or cancellation.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricted this right in practice. Although the 1996 amended Constitution affirms the equality of religions and denominations before the law, it also contains restrictive language stipulating that cooperation between the state and religious organizations "is regulated with regard for their influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and state traditions of the Belarusian people." OPRRNA regulates all religious matters.

In 2002 President Lukashenko signed a religion law despite protests from human rights organizations, the European Union, and domestic religious groups. The law recognizes the "determining role of the Orthodox Church in the historical formation and development of spiritual, cultural, and state traditions of the Belarusian people" as well as the historical importance of Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Evangelical Lutheranism, groups commonly referred to as "traditional faiths." However, the traditional faiths mentioned by the law do not include religious groups such as the Priestless Old Believers and Calvinist churches, which have historical roots in the country dating to the 17th century.

Despite the law's guarantee of religious freedom, it contains a number of restrictive elements that increase the Government's control of the activities of religious groups. The law requires all religious groups to receive prior governmental approval to import and distribute literature, prevents foreigners from leading religious organizations, and denies religious communities the right to establish schools to train their own clergy. In addition, the law confines the activity of religious communities to areas where they are registered and establishes complex registration require-

ments that some communities, both "traditional" and "nontraditional," have difficulty fulfilling. The law also required all previously registered groups to reregister by 2004 and bans all religious activity by unregistered groups.

The religion law establishes three tiers of religious groups: religious communities, religious associations, and republican religious associations. Religious communities, or local individual religious organizations, must include at least 20 persons over the age of 18 who live in neighboring areas. Religious associations must include at least 10 religious communities, one of which must have been active in the country for at least 20 years, and may be constituted only by a republican (national level) religious association. Republican religious associations can be formed only when there are active religious communities in the majority of the country's six regions.

A religious community must submit a list of its founders' names, places of residence, citizenship, and signatures, along with copies of its founding statutes, minutes of its founding meeting, and permission from the regional authorities confirming the community's right to occupy or use any property indicated in its founding statutes. Regional executive committees (for groups outside of Minsk) or the Minsk City Executive Committee handle all registration applications. For a community practicing a religion not previously "known" to the Government, information about the faith must also be submitted. No previously "unknown" religious communities were registered during the reporting period.

A religious association must provide a list of members of the managing body with biographical information, proof of permission for the association to be at its designated location, and minutes from its founding congress. Religious associations have the exclusive right to establish religious educational institutions, invite foreigners to work with religious groups, and organize cloistered and monastic communities. All applications to establish associations and republican associations must be submitted to OPRRNA. The Government registered five republican religious organizations during the reporting period. Domestic religious groups continued to call for revocation of at least part of the 2002 law. Christian communities maintained that the law heavily restricts their activities, suppresses freedom of religion, and legalizes criminal prosecution of individuals for their religious beliefs.

The 2003 concordat between the BOC and the Government guarantees the BOC autonomy in its internal affairs, freedom to perform religious rites and other activities, and a special relationship with the state. The concordat recognizes the BOC's "influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and national traditions of the Belarusian people." It 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 would not limit the religious freedoms of other religious groups, the concordat calls for the Government and the BOC to combat unnamed "pseudoreligious structures that present a danger to individuals and society." In addition, the BOC possesses the exclusive right to use the word "Orthodox" in its title and to use the image of the Cross of Euphrosynia, the patron saint of the country, as its symbol.

On January 8, 2007, President Lukashenko honored several BOC members with "For Spiritual Revival" awards in recognition of their efforts to develop "moral traditions which contribute to the spiritual values . . . between various nationalities and religions." In a meeting with BOC bishops on December 21, 2006, President Lukashenko praised the cooperation between the Government and the BOC and stressed their common goals of civil accord and national unity. The President also noted the Government's assistance to the BOC: in 2006 the Government funded $3 million (6.4 billion rubles) in BOC projects.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted religious freedom both actively and indirectly. The Government enforced laws that limit freedom of worship, speech, and assembly. The Government was sometimes responsible for and regularly failed to condemn acts of religious insensitivity or intolerance. The Government frequently referred to groups it did not consider to be traditional as "nontraditional," and Government officials and state media widely used the term "sect" when referring to such groups, although it is not an official designation. Foreign missionaries, clergy, and charity workers faced increased Government obstacles, including deportation and visa refusal or revocation. With or without official registration, some religious groups encountered difficulty renting or purchasing property to establish places of worship, building churches, or reacquiring state-controlled religious property.

Forum 18 reported that the BOC and Government officials pressured the parishioners of the unregistered Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), which split from the BOC in 1927, to withdraw their names from the ROCA's registration application. If even 1 of the 20 signatories of the application were to withdraw his or

her name, ROCA would be forced to start the process again. ROCA stated that from August to October 2006, two Moscow Patriarchate priests threatened to withhold sacraments from the parishioners if they continued supporting the "illegal and uncanonical sect." ROCA claimed that the two priests received the parishioners' names from local authorities.

On September 14, 2006, Pastor Sergei Heil, chair of the unregistered Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church in the Republic of Belarus, reported that the Government refused to register it as a republic-wide association. The Church has tried since October 2004 to register as an association and held four founding sessions in Bobruysk to comply with the registration requirements. OPRRNA maintained that there were "technical errors" in its application.

Many "traditional" and "nontraditional" religious groups continued to experience problems obtaining property or registering property, particularly when attempting to convert residential property for religious use. According to the Government, the law permits residential property to be used for religious services only after it has been converted from residential use. The housing code permits the use of such property for nonresidential purposes with the permission of local executive and administrative bodies. As a result, several Protestant churches and "nontraditional" groups were at an impasse: denied permission to convert their properties for religious use because they were not registered, but unable to register due to the lack of a legal address. Such groups often were forced to meet illegally or in the homes of individual members.

On March 22, 2007, the Supreme Economic Court adjourned indefinitely a case involving the New Life Church in Minsk. The New Life Church faced closure because authorities refused to register it at the cow barn it owned and wished to use for worship; its unregistered status made all its activities illegal. To protest a July 24, 2006, order by the Minsk City Economic Court to sell the church building to the city at a price far below market value and to vacate the premises by October 8, 2006, New Life Church members and sympathizers began a 23-day hunger strike, which prompted the authorities to review their decision. With the permission of Minsk local authorities, approximately 700 New Life Church parishioners and supporters rallied on Bangalore Square on October 21, 2006, to protest the forced sale. The case remained under consideration at the end of the reporting period.

On December 6, 2006, Grodno authorities granted permission for the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of Mercy Roman Catholic community to build a church for its 8,000-member parish, which had been worshipping in a small wooden house that could accommodate only 300 persons. Twelve members of the church had launched a hunger strike on December 1, 2006, and continued it until authorities agreed to their request. The community first applied for permission to build a church in 1998.

On December 4, 2006, the Minsk Community of Krishna Consciousness (the Hare Krishnas) was forced out of its office in a vehicle service station following an inspection by the sanitary and emergency management authorities. The inspectors, however, allowed all other tenants to remain. The Minsk and Bobruysk Hare Krishna communities had searched for a legal address since being denied registration in 2004. They had attempted to register at the vehicle service station, but in November 2006 authorities denied the application.

On July 15, 2006, the Supreme Court rejected the appeal of Pastor Georgiy Vyazovskiy against the closure of his Christ Covenant Reformed Baptist Church. The Minsk City Court closed the church in May 2006 because the congregation had attempted to register at a residential building in violation of the law's mandate that all religious groups be registered at a "legal" address.

A Government decree specifies measures to ensure public order and safety during general public gatherings. Some meeting hall officials cited the decree as a basis for canceling or refusing to extend agreements with religious groups for the use of their facilities. During the reporting period it remained difficult, particularly for unregistered groups, to rent a public facility. Protestant communities suffered most from this decree, since they were less likely to own their own property and needed to rent public space when their members were too numerous to meet in private homes.

On June 25, 2007, the Minsk Tsentralniy District informed John the Baptist Church that it could not rent space at the state Trade Unions House, allegedly due to scheduling conflicts.

Between February 2006 and the end of the reporting period, the charismatic Living Word Church in Grodno tried at least seven times to rent meeting space, but state proprietors refused each attempt.

On December 28, 2006, State Ideology Officer Oleg Bobryk interrupted without explanation a seminar on family relationships held by a Protestant preacher at the Volozhyn Palace of Culture. Volozhyn authorities dismissed 15 Palace of Culture employees that same day. Vefil Evangelical Christian Baptist Pastor Sergey Yasku

alleged the dismissals were an attempt by Government officials to "eliminate any cooperation of evangelical Christians with public organizations."

The Government restricted peaceful assembly for religious activities during the reporting period. On June 4, 2007, the Minsk City Executive Committee denied permission for the unregistered Belarus Christian Democracy party (BCD) to stage a June 8 rally protesting authorities' crackdown on freedom of conscience on Freedom Square. In April 2007 authorities similarly denied the BCD permission to stage a rally in support of religious freedom.

There were credible reports that local authorities and teachers sought to identify which children attended Baptist Sunday school. According to Forum 18, Baptist pastor Gennady Brutskiy alleged that children identified as having attended Baptist Sunday school were threatened by the head teacher. Similarly, Pastor Yasku claimed State Ideology Officer Bobryk demanded that teachers find out whether their students attended Protestant Sunday school. If children attended such a school, the teachers had to "have a talk" with their parents.

During the reporting period, the Government monitored peaceful minority religious groups, especially those perceived as "foreign" or "cults." Credible sources reported that state security officers often attended Protestant services to conduct surveillance.

Approval for visits by foreign religious workers often involved a lengthy bureaucratic process. The law requires 1-year, multiple-entry "spiritual activities" visas for foreign missionaries and clergy. An organization inviting foreign clergy must make a written request to OPRRNA, including the proposed dates and reason for the requested visit. Even if the visit is for nonreligious purposes such as charitable activities, representatives must obtain a visa and permission from OPRRNA. OPRRNA has 20 days in which to respond, and there is no provision for appeal of its decision.

Observers expressed concern that lack of uniform Government guidance on implementation of February 2006 changes to visa laws affected the ability of missionaries to live and work in the country. Authorities frequently questioned foreign missionaries and humanitarian workers and the local citizens who worked with them about the sources and use of their funding. There were also credible reports that these foreign workers were followed and surveilled by security personnel.

According to Forum 18, in September 2006 authorities refused Israeli citizen Rabbi Boruch Lamdan permission to conduct religious activity due to his alleged "illegal commercial activity," although he was allowed to remain in the country. Rabbi Lamdan denied the allegations, stating that the refusal stemmed from his late tax payments on charitable donations that were sent to him personally. Lamdan departed the country in June 2007 after the Government did not renew his religious visa.

In July 2006 authorities denied permission for the unregistered Full Gospel Union to invite Nigerian pastor Anselm Madubuko to preach at three New Generation member churches. The authorities claimed that the group had "no basis" to invite him since it is unregistered and noted that they considered Madubuko's visit "inexpedient" given the New Generation's alleged "violation of Belarusian law."

The Government does not permit foreign missionaries to engage in religious activity outside of their host institutions. Transferring between religious organizations, including parishes, requires prior state permission. For example, on October 13, 2006, authorities fined Polish citizen and Catholic priest Antoni Koczko $29 (62,000 rubles) for conducting an "unauthorized" religious service in Minsk, since he had been assigned to a church in Slutsk.

Internal affairs agencies may compel the departure of foreign clergy by denying registrations and stay permits. Authorities may act independently or based on recommendations from other Government entities.

In spring 2007 the founder/pastor of the Minsk-based New Testament Church and pastor of its Messianic Jewish congregation, an American citizen who had worked in the country for 10 years, was forced to leave the country. Authorities had refused to renew his work permit in spring 2006. In October 2006 authorities refused to renew visas for 12 Polish Catholic nuns and priests from the Grodno region who had been working in the country for more than 10 years, citing the need to provide local graduates of the Catholic seminaries with jobs. Despite hunger strikes, petitions, and protests by the Catholic community, the priests and nuns were told to leave the country by December 31, 2006.

Legislation prohibits "subversive activities" by foreign organizations and the establishment of offices by foreign organizations whose activities incite "national, religious, and racial enmity" or could "have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the people." On May 30, 2007, authorities fined Polish citizen Yaroslav Lukasik, an unofficial pastor of the John the Baptist Church, $15 (31,000 rubles) for conducting unauthorized religious services at a fellow pastor's home on May 27.

At the same time, they issued him deportation papers for "repeated violations of the regime governing the presence of foreigners," ordered him to leave the country by June 7, and barred him from reentry for 5 years. Lukasik denied the charges, stating that he had attended, not conducted, religious services on May 27. On May 8, 2007, authorities canceled Lukasik's residency permit due to his alleged involvement in "activities aimed at causing damage to the national security." Lukasik appealed the fine and the deportation order to the local court, but the court denied the appeals on June 20 and June 27, respectively. Lukasik is married to a local citizen and has three local citizen children. Independent media reported that his family also appealed to a higher court in Minsk; however, authorities alleged that the papers related to the case were "lost" and could not be found before the statute of limitations for the appeal expired.

Foreign citizens officially in the country for nonreligious work can be reprimanded or expelled if they participate in religious activities.

On June 21, 2007, a Mogilyov judge overturned penalties involving seven U.S. citizens due to technical errors and sent the case back for a retrial. On February 16, 2007, the Government had deported the seven and banned them from the country for 2 years for two separate counts of illegal teaching and illegal religious activities. On February 13, the police charged the group with violating article 185 of the administrative code, "Violation of Rules of Foreign Citizens' Stay in Belarus" and fined them $15 (32,000 rubles) each for engaging in activities incompatible with the terms of their visas; according to the Government, the seven failed to obtain prior permission from the Education Ministry before they began teaching English at a house of worship in Mogilyov. The charges stemmed from a February 9 police raid on a church building; the results of the retrial were pending at the end of the reporting period.

On March 14, 2007, authorities canceled the residency permit of a U.S. Protestant humanitarian aid worker and deported him. Authorities claimed he was involved in activities "aimed at causing damage to national security" without explaining the alleged threat. The man had served as a charity worker and attended a Protestant church in Minsk.

Baptist Union representative Gennadiy Brutskiy reported that authorities questioned a U.S. citizen who held a humanitarian work visa after he addressed a Bible college graduation ceremony in May 2006. In March 2007 authorities refused to renew the man's visa, forcing him to leave the country.

By law, citizens are not prohibited from proselytizing and may speak freely about their religious beliefs; however, in practice authorities often interfered with or punished some individuals who proselytized on behalf of registered or unregistered religious groups. Authorities regulated every aspect of proselytizing and literature distribution.

The Government continued to harass and fine Hare Krishnas for illegally distributing religious literature. In January 2007 authorities confiscated 14 books from a Hare Krishna and fined the person $15 (32,000 rubles) for illegally distributing religious material.

On June 12, 2007, police removed a sign that read "I have the right to faith" from a bridge in downtown Minsk within 90 minutes of its placement there by opposition activists.

The Government continued to use textbooks that promoted religious intolerance, especially toward "nontraditional" faiths. Leaders of Protestant communities criticized language in the textbook *Basics of Home and Personal Security* as discriminatory against Protestants, particularly the chapter entitled "Beware of Sects." The chapter includes a paragraph informing students of such "sects" as Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Maria, White Brotherhood, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The Ministry of Education continued to use the textbook *Man, Society, and State*, which labels Protestants and Hare Krishnas as "sects," even after protests by religious groups. The authorities promised to change the language in the next edition of the books; neither book was republished by the end of the period covered by this report.

During the reporting period, the Government took steps to "warn" the public of "new" groups and discouraged their growth. On June 15, 2007, the state newspaper *Respublika* published an article titled "New Crusaders" which compared contemporary Catholic missionary activities to the Crusades and characterized the involvement of Pope John Paul II in the fall of communism as a "devilish enterprise," alleging collaboration with the CIA. The Polish community in the country denounced the article and called for criminal charges against its author and the newspaper's editor. *Respublika* later issued an apology. On December 12, 2006, *Respublika* urged Government authorities to treat "new" religions with extreme caution because they might lead to tragedy and pose threats to society. The author alleged that new reli-

gions, including Scientology, Kabbalah, and Buddhism, are syncretic and do not teach their followers "anything good."

On May 21, 2007, God's Grace Head Pastor Sergey Khomich received a letter from the state-controlled Lad television channel denying any wrongdoing in a May 12 broadcast in which a television host referred to the God's Grace community as a "totalitarian and destructive sect." While broadcasting footage of a God's Grace prayer service and a conference, host Artyom Makhakeyev accused healers of swindling money out of sick people and warned that the wealthy "frequently become the focus of sects' attention."

On December 8, 2006, the Government informed the New Life Church that it would not initiate a case against state-controlled Capital TV (STV). On October 14 and 15, 2006, STV made slanderous allegations against the unregistered Protestant group in a report entitled "Strange Worshippers of a No Less Strange Religion." When STV would not retract its allegations, the New Life Church asked the authorities to open a criminal case against STV and to refute the station's allegations. The Government refused on the grounds that "there was no sign of any crime in their actions."

Despite the BOC's favored status, the Government also warned about the "excessive influence" of the BOC. President Lukashenko met with senior BOC bishops on December 21, 2006, to explain his "pragmatic" approach to the BOC after it complained about an article in a state newspaper by a presidential administration official that warned citizens against the BOC's influence and claimed that it weakens the impact of state ideology.

There were credible reports of Government interference with religious travel. The Belarus-based Christian Human Rights House reported that on January 3, 2007, authorities stopped and searched a bus carrying approximately 40 young Catholics and Protestants at the Belarus-Poland border for approximately 5 hours. The group was returning to Belarus after a pilgrimage to Croatia.

On August 9, 2006, border guards took into custody and transported to Minsk 47 Baptist children and adults who were on a religious retreat at a private homestead in the western Grodno region for alleged violations of health and safety regulations. The previous day, local authorities had ordered the gathering to disperse and threatened to take the children to a police facility for juvenile delinquents and abandoned children. After their release, a senior Minsk religious affairs official publicly conceded that the retreat was legal since private individuals had organized the event. According to Forum 18, different Government departments conducted up to four daily checks on a Baptist summer youth camp in the Brest region.

Limited restitution of religious property occurred during the reporting period. There is no legal basis for restitution of property seized during the Soviet and Nazi occupations, and the law restricts the restitution of property being used for cultural or educational purposes. The Government did not return buildings if it had nowhere to move the current occupants. For example, most of the Jewish community's past requests for the return of Minsk synagogues, which were in use as theaters, museums, sports complexes, and a beer hall, were refused. However, during the reporting period Jewish communities did not request the return of buildings or other real estate.

On November 28, 2006, local authorities in Volozhyn threatened to rescind the Jewish community's rights to possess a restituted yeshiva building due to lack of renovation work. The Jewish community had started renovations on the yeshiva, which had been returned to the community in the 1990s, but ran out of funds before completing them. The authorities ultimately did not confiscate the 200-year-old building after a U.S.-based committee pledged in May 2007 to raise funds to finance the renovation.

At the end of the reporting period, the St. Joseph Catholic community in Minsk continued a campaign for the Government to return former Bernardine church and monastery buildings, home to the state archives and slated to be converted into a hotel and entertainment center. The community has held regular prayer services at the site since first learning of reconstruction plans in 2004, but in March 2007 the Government announced new conversion plans, after which the community launched the petition drive. As of June 4, 2007, the petition had more than 10,000 signatures. Previously, the OPRRNA chairman said that since the Government did not have funds to construct new archive buildings, the church and monastery could not be handed back. On June 7, authorities prevented the community from gathering to pray, stating that they needed permission to assemble, but did not detain any worshippers. On June 16, approximately 90 persons gathered outside the church and lit candles while police watched.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to abuse the religious freedom of several religious groups. As in the past, the most common charge against religious leaders was organizing or hosting an unauthorized meeting, a charge that arises from a law circumscribing freedom of assembly.

The law allows persons to gather to pray in private homes; however, it imposes restrictions on holding rituals, rites, or ceremonies in such locations and requires prior permission from local authorities. During the reporting period, Protestant and non-BOC Orthodox communities were fined or warned for illegally conducting religious services, carrying out unsanctioned religious activities, or illegally gathering without prior Government permission.

On June 26, 2007, the Minsk Central District Court rejected a complaint by Antony Bokun, pastor of the registered John the Baptist Church, that police mistreated him following his arrest earlier in the month. On June 4, 2007, a Minsk District Court Judge sentenced Bokun to 3 days in prison for organizing an unauthorized religious service in his home on June 3. On that day, 10 officials raided Bokun's home during church services and took him and Polish Protestant pastor Yaroslav Lukasik to a police station. The police released Lukasik after a few hours but held Bokun overnight despite his cardiovascular condition. He became ill and needed medical attention. On June 27 and June 20, 2007, respectively, the Minsk City Court dismissed Bokun's appeals of a jail sentence and fine stemming from a separate incident. On May 28, the court had found Bokun guilty of conducting an illegal religious service and fined him $290 (620,000 rubles). Police officers had arrested Bokun on May 27 after entering his house and videotaping the service.

On May 8, 2007, police detained and warned youth activist Ivan Shutko that his participation in the campaign to prevent the Roman Catholic monastery in Minsk from being transformed into a hotel and casino might result in "great problems."

On April 11, 2007, authorities issued an official warning to Sergey Nesterovich of the unregistered God's Transfiguration Brotherhood for regularly conducting illegal religious meetings in his apartment and collecting funds. In March 2007 KGB secret police had conducted a 3-hour raid of Nesterovich's apartment during a prayer meeting. The police searched the apartment, confiscated written materials, and questioned and photographed the attendees. Nesterovich appealed the warning, but authorities denied the appeal.

In December 2006 authorities issued Pastor Nikolay Borichevskiy of the Grace of Jesus Church in Krupki village a written warning for violating residence permit regulations; he ignored the warning and remained in Krupki. When Borichevskiy asked what had brought on the charge, the officials responded that his repeated criticism of the regime drew their attention.

On August 30, 2006, Union of Evangelical Christians Salvation Church (UECSC) pastor Sergey Poznyakovich was fined $2,170 (4.65 million rubles) for performing a baptism ceremony in a nearby lake. In July 2006 UECSC Bishop Nikolay Kurkayev was fined $75 (160,000 rubles) for holding an unauthorized religious service. On July 28, 2006, authorities fined New Life Church Pastor Vyacheslav Goncharenko $470 (1 million rubles) for having conducted an unsanctioned religious service earlier that month. During the previous reporting period, there were at least 13 reported instances of the Government imposing fines ranging from $13 to $2,600 (26,000 to 5.3 million rubles) for illegal religious activity.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The number of individual anti-Semitic incidents increased during the reporting period. Anti-Semitism is tolerated by the state. Anti-Semitic acts were only sporadically investigated, and the Government allowed state enterprises to freely print and distribute anti-Semitic material.

Unlike in previous reporting periods, state-owned periodicals did not attack Jewish religious groups; however, the sale and distribution of anti-Semitic literature through state press distributors, Government agencies, and stores affiliated with the BOC continued. During the reporting period, anti-Semitic and Russian ultranationalist newspapers and literature, DVDs, and videocassettes continued to be sold at Pravoslavnaya Kniga (Orthodox Bookstore), which sells Orthodox literature and religious paraphernalia. The store was part of the Khristianskaya Initsiativa company, whose general director often wrote xenophobic articles. The store continued to distribute the anti-Semitic and xenophobic newspaper *Russkiy*

Vestnik despite a 2003 order by the Prosecutor General and the Ministry of Information to remove copies from the store. The official BOC Web site honors Gavril Belostokskiy, a young child allegedly murdered by Jews near Grodno in 1690, as one of its saints and martyrs. A memorial prayer to be said on the anniversary of his death alleges the "martyred and courageous" Gavril "exposed Jewish dishonesty." The book *Demons on the Russian Land: Globalism as a Product of Evil*, by Belarusian National Academy of Sciences (BNAS) researcher Valeriy Zelenevskiy, was also available at Pravoslavnaya Kniga. Published in Minsk at the end of 2006, the book contains numerous anti-Semitic statements, such as "the Jews still adhere to pro-slavery views." Since the state-run BNAS approved publishing of the book, Jewish leaders and human rights activists considered the book to be a reflection of certain segments of the regime's ideology.

Several Jewish religious sites were vandalized during the reporting period.

On June 28, 2007, local Jewish leaders reported that four gravestones in a Jewish cemetery were knocked down by vandals in Mogilyov earlier in the week. Relatives of those buried in the graves appealed to the police, one of whom theorized that the heavy tombstones may have been knocked down by a wind storm, despite the fact that there were no strong storms around the time of the incident.

On May 9, 2007, vandals set fire to flowers laid at the monument to the victims of the Brest Jewish ghetto. Police opened a criminal case but did not identify any suspects. This was the eighth act of vandalism at the monument since it was erected in 1992 and the third during this reporting period. In February 2007 vandals desecrated the monument, but no suspects were identified. On November 29, 2006, an explosion occurred at the same monument. The blast caused minor damage to the memorial. The Jewish community protested the local authorities' refusal to open a criminal investigation into the November incident, which police described as petty hooliganism. According to a local Jewish community leader, police were still investigating the February incident at the end of the reporting period.

On May 4, 2007, vandals drew a picture of a Star of David hanging from a gallows on the foundation of a bridge in Brest. The graffiti was removed not long after it appeared and the local Jewish community did not file a report with the police.

On March 1, 2007, independent media reported that vandals removed part of a metal plaque attached to a monument built on the site of an old Jewish cemetery in remembrance of the killing of the Minsk ghetto Bremen Jews. Also in early March 2007, a bronze memorial plaque on a residential building in central Minsk placed in remembrance of the killing of the Bremen Jews disappeared. An unidentified man claimed to have found the plaque and returned it to the Jewish community following announcements that the German ambassador would pay a $1,350 (2.9 million rubles) reward for the plaque's return. At the end of February 2007, vandals damaged the Star of David on a memorial plaque in Kurapaty honoring Jewish victims of Stalinism.

On May 3, 2007, police in Borisov opened a criminal case in connection with vandalism at the Jewish cemetery. Vandals had removed and damaged 16 tombstones at the end of April. The case remained open at the end of the reporting period; no suspects were identified.

In late February 2007, neo-Nazi activists attacked Larissa Shukailo, the head of the Mogilyov branch of the Belarusian Association for Victims of Political Repression. Two young persons threw a bottle at Shukailo, shouting "Get away to your Israel!" Shukailo filed a complaint with the authorities, but no suspects were identified by the end of the reporting period.

On November 12, 2006, vandals desecrated the Yama Holocaust memorial in central Minsk with white paint and swastikas. Despite a number of neo-Nazi anti-Semitic leaflets signed by the "Belaya Rus Aryan Resistance Front" found at the site, authorities dismissed the incident as a case of teenage hooliganism. The same day swastikas and "Beat the Jews!" graffiti were painted on the Israeli Information and Cultural Center. State-controlled STV's coverage of the vandal attacks referred to Jewish culture as "alien to Belarus." Despite Government officials' promises to prosecute offenders, on March 16, 2007, police closed the criminal cases, citing lack of suspects.

In early October 2006, unidentified vandals damaged a concrete fence surrounding a Jewish cemetery and destroyed 10 tombstones in the northern city of Orsha; 17 gravestones were vandalized at a Christian cemetery. Police refused to open criminal cases, calling the acts minor civil offenses.

In September 2006 vandals damaged five graves in an old Jewish cemetery in the eastern village of Sverzhan. Police opened an investigation, but no suspects were identified by the end of the reporting period.

The Jewish community continued to express concern over the concept of a "greater Slavic union" popular among nationalist organizations active in the country, includ-

ing the Russian National Union (RNU), which still existed despite being officially dissolved in 2000. Throughout the reporting period, Jewish leaders petitioned the authorities to investigate neo-Nazi activities, citing continued vandalism, anti-Semitic graffiti, and threats to civil society and religious congregations. Authorities responded with empathetic letters but did not open any criminal cases in connection with these complaints.

On August 10, 2006, independent newspaper *Vitebskiy Kuryer* received a letter from the neo-Nazi group RNU threatening to close the newspaper if it continued publishing articles discrediting the Belarusian president and his policies aimed at making "Slavonic nations superior in comparison with Jews." The letterhead contained the slogan "To clean Russia!" and a picture of a soldier holding a strangled man with the Star of David painted on his breast and U.S. dollars in his pocket. Law enforcement agencies did not investigate the threat, maintaining that since the RNU was not registered in the region, it was impossible to track down the letter's authors.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some positive developments in respect for religious freedom during the reporting period.

Authorities granted the St. John the Baptist Catholic Community permission to build a church in Minsk and gave the community a plot of land for the building. Construction began on June 15, 2007. This was the first Catholic church to be built in Minsk since the 1917 Revolution.

In 2007 authorities returned a building in Grodno to the St. Pokrovskiy Orthodox Cathedral.

In August 2006 civil society activists in Orsha managed to save the remains of an 18th-century church. The activists sent letters and petitions to local government officials protesting the construction of a detention center on the site. In early August construction was suspended, and on August 31 officials agreed to alter the project in an effort to prevent the construction from damaging the church's foundation.

On July 20, 2006, the Prosecutor's Office repealed a warning to preschool teacher Lyudmila Izakson-Bolotovskaya for the "illegal and deliberate dissemination of religious dogma to young children" following her appeal. In April 2006 authorities had issued an official warning to Izakson-Bolotovskaya after she and her children's Jewish musical group were shown on local television celebrating a Jewish holiday at a state-run kindergarten. Authorities had claimed that she violated the law by holding a religious celebration in a Government building and illegally propagated Judaism. Izakson-Bolotovskaya maintained that this was a cultural event for nonreligious educational purposes. The authorities forced Izakson-Bolotovskaya to remove "Jewish symbols" from the classroom and threatened her with future prosecution if she continued such activities. The group reconvened in September 2006 to continue studying Jewish history and traditions.

On July 5, 2006, President Lukashenko issued a directive to return the Holy Trinity Church (St. Roch Church) in Minsk and property inside to the Roman Catholic Church. For the previous 15 years, the church was used as the music hall for the Belarusian State Philharmonic Society.

Several religious memorials were unveiled during the reporting period. Although most were privately funded, local government officials participated in most dedication ceremonies.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

While some members of society tried to promote religious freedom, societal abuses and discrimination based on religious beliefs occurred, and anti-Semitism and negative attitudes toward minority religious groups persisted.

As in previous years, unknown vandals destroyed crosses, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, erected at Kurapaty, an area used by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs to murder more than 300,000 people in the 1930s. In April 2007 vandals attacked the Stalin-era massacre memorial site at Kurapaty, knocking over and breaking six crosses. No criminal investigation took place by the end of the reporting period.

On May 30, 2007, unidentified burglars broke into the St. George Church in Vardomichy, stealing five icons. This was the latest in a string of unsolved church burglaries that resulted in the theft of 16 icons from 3 different churches in 2007. Police did not report any breakthroughs in their investigations of these crimes, which they attributed to a ring of experienced criminals.

There were several incidents of arson during the reporting period. On March 27, 2007, vandals set fire to the Roman Catholic St. Michael Church in Mozyr and drew

satanic graffiti on the exterior walls. Ten days earlier, vandals broke a sculpture, crosses, and a window at the church. On March 28, police arrested four members of the satanic group Bloody Moon; the suspects remained in jail, and the investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On December 25, 2006, vandals set fire to the Orthodox St. George Church in Mozyr, completely destroying its roof and interior walls. The remaining external walls were covered with graffiti. This was the second time the church had been set on fire in 6 weeks; on November 13, vandals drew satanic symbols on the outside of the church and set it on fire. The four members of the Bloody Moon satanic group who were detained for vandalizing the St. Michael Church in Mozyr pled guilty to setting fire to the St. George Church. They remained in police custody and the investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

On July 13, 2006, there was a suspicious fire at the Roman Catholic St. Francis Xavier (Farny) Church in Grodno. The fire destroyed part of the main altar and four 18th-century sculptures. Police opened a criminal case, but no further information was available at the end of the reporting period.

Several cemeteries and burial grounds were attacked or damaged during the reporting period. On April 27, 2007, police charged a man with damaging historical property after five 10th- and 11th-century burial mounds were vandalized in Zaslavl on March 10 and 16, 2007. No further information was available by the end of the reporting period.

On February 13, 2007, police suspended a criminal investigation into a January 15, 2007, attack on a Muslim cemetery in Slonim that contains the graves of Russian Muslim soldiers killed in World War I due to failure to find suspects. Vandals overturned six gravestones, destroying two. This was the third attack on the cemetery since 1996.

Independent media reported that on November 20, 2006, unidentified vandals painted "Don't Believe Sects!" on a billboard in Baranovichi that directed persons to the Salvation Church, an affiliate of the Union of Evangelical Faith Christians in the Republic of Belarus. Officials and media opined that drunken teenagers might have been the vandals. The church claimed that this was an organized action.

On November 17, 2006, the New Life Church reported that police refused to institute criminal proceedings in connection with the defacing of their church on the night of October 31, 2006. Alleged members of the National Bolshevik Party, a Russian extremist group, splashed black paint on the church and painted in red "No to Totalitarian Sects!" and the party's symbol.

During the reporting period, there were some positive actions undertaken by private actors to promote greater respect and tolerance among different religions and to promote religious freedom.

On June 18, 2007, the General Secretaries of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Europe concluded a 4-day forum held in Minsk. It was the first time in the contemporary history of the country that the secretaries gathered in Minsk. They discussed migration, ecumenism, pastoral care, relations with Muslim communities, and the issues facing the Roman Catholic communities in the country, including difficulties with building new churches. On June 15, the secretaries had a successful meeting with BOC Head Metropolitan Philaret.

On May 28, 2007, BOC Head Metropolitan Philaret expressed support for the public organizing committee for the commemoration of the victims of Stalinist repressions.

In February 2007 Roma and Baptist communities worked together to provide the Roma population with gospels in Romany at no charge.

On April 19, 2007, the NGO Christian Human Rights House, in cooperation with the BCD, released "Monitoring of the Violations of Christians' Rights in Belarus," which chronicled repression against Christians during 2006. Christian Human Rights House was created in the summer of 2006 to monitor religious freedom violations and to work to alleviate the repression of freedom of conscience in the country.

On June 17, 2007, more than 500 Protestant communities across the country gathered at churches to conduct prayer services calling for changes in the religion law that they see as discriminatory against Protestant congregations. On April 22, Christian communities, including Protestants and Catholics, some individual Orthodox priests, and the BCD launched a campaign to collect 50,000 signatures on a petition calling for the revocation of the 2002 law on religions and religious organizations. On May 8, the Belarusian Exarchate of the ROC urged believers not to sign the petition, claiming that the law helps maintain peace among religious communities and stability in the country. By the end of the reporting period, the campaign reported collecting thousands of signatures.

On June 4, 2007, independent news services reported that approximately 5,000 Protestants gathered at the Church of Grace in Minsk to pray for persecuted reli-

gious activists and for freedom of religion, including the right to pray in private homes. The crowd adopted an appeal to President Lukashenko requesting a review of the 2002 religion law and an end to the arrests of ministers.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government raises religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; however, officials repeatedly turned down U.S. Government representatives' requests for meetings to discuss possible infringements.

Embassy staff maintained regular contact with representatives of religious groups and met with resident and visiting U.S. citizens of various religious groups to discuss religious freedom issues in the country. Embassy officials attended several events hosted by religious groups, including the unveiling of religious monuments. The Embassy demonstrated support for religious freedom by attending trials of persecuted religious groups. The U.S. Government denounced incidents of anti-Semitism and took action to help prevent future acts, including following up on reports of desecrated Jewish memorial sites and cemeteries. The Embassy monitored the continuing sale of anti-Semitic and xenophobic literature in stores and at events linked with the BOC and state media distributors. Embassy officials regularly included stops at religious sites during regional travel.

Embassy officials discussed religious issues with representatives of other foreign diplomatic missions and coordinated actions to demonstrate solidarity in their support for religious freedom. For example, the U.S. Ambassador, together with European Union ambassadors, visited the embattled New Life Church during a hunger strike by church members to protest the Government's forced sale of church property.

BELGIUM

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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, Government officials continued to have the authority to research and monitor religious groups that are not officially recognized.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Some reports of anti-Semitic or Islamophobic acts are difficult to ascribe to a primary motivation of ethnicity or religious belief, as they are often inextricably linked. Some reports of discrimination against minority religious groups surfaced, as well.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,780 square miles and a population of 10.5 million.

The Government does not keep statistics listing religious affiliation but the population is predominantly Roman Catholic, according to a 2006 Government report and a university study issued in 2000. According to a separate survey issued in 2000, which surveyed philosophical orientation based on self-identification, 47 percent of the population identify themselves as practicing Catholics, but a slightly larger number, 57.3 percent, identify themselves as belonging to the Catholic Church. Fifteen percent identify themselves as being Christian, but neither Catholic nor Protestant. Another 8.8 percent are nonbelievers and another 8.5 percent identify themselves as belonging to the nonreligious philosophical community.

The number of adherents belonging to smaller religious groups are: Islam, 400,000 adherents: Protestantism, 140,000; Orthodox, 70,000; Jewish, 55,000; and Anglicanism 11,000. The larger nonrecognized religions include Jehovah's Witnesses (25,000 baptized, 50,000 "churchgoers"). Estimates for other bodies include the independent Protestant congregations, 10,000; Buddhists, 10,000; members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 4,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 2,000; Hindus, 5,000; Sikhs, 3,000; Hare Krishnas, 1,500; and the Church of Scientology, 200–300.

A 2005 Free University of Brussels (ULB) report estimates that 15 percent of the Catholic population regularly attend religious services, and 10 percent of the Muslim population are "practicing Muslims." Despite these limited numbers, religion continues to play a role in major life events. Within the Catholic population, 65 percent of the children born in the country are baptized, 49.2 percent of couples opt for a religious marriage, and 76.6 percent of funerals include religious services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government accords "recognized" status to Catholicism, Protestantism (including Evangelicals and Pentecostals), Judaism, Anglicanism (separately from other Protestant groups), Islam, and Orthodox (Greek and Russian). Representative bodies for these religious groups receive subsidies from Government revenues. The Government also supports the freedom to participate in secular 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 other recognized religious groups.

The Federal Government and Parliament have responsibility for recognizing religious groups and paying the wages and pensions of ministers of those groups. As a result of constitutional reform enacted in 2001, federal authorities devolved responsibility for ensuring religious instruction, financial accountability of religious groups, and religious buildings to other levels of government. For example, while parish operations and the upkeep of churches fall under municipal authorities, the provinces sustain the cost of mosque buildings. At the same time, the Flemish, Francophone and German-language community governments pay religious teacher salaries and the costs of public broadcasting.

In 2007 the Federal Government paid $134 million (€103 million) to the recognized religious groups. This sum included $15.2 million (€11.7 million) to lay organizations, and $8.7 million (€6.7 million) to Islamic religious groups. For 2006 the federal budget outlays totaled $127 million (€98 million). According to data supplied by the Justice Ministry, in 2006 the Federal Government made salary payments to 3,021 Catholic priests, 110 Protestant/Evangelical and 12 Anglican ministers, 35 Jewish rabbis, 48 Orthodox priests, and 247 lay consultants. The federal and regional authorities continued to deliberate with the Muslim Council on the criteria for providing payments to Muslim clerics. In the absence of an agreement, no such payments were made during the period covered by this report. The total outlays by all levels of government (for religious education and by municipal authorities for buildings) amounted to approximately $780.62 million (approximately €580 million). Note: the 2006 report erroneously used Belgian francs instead of euros.

The public educational system, from kindergarten to university, requires strict neutrality of presentation of religious views for teaching personnel, except for teachers of religion. Religious or "moral" instruction is mandatory in public schools and is provided according to the student's religious or nonreligious preference. All public schools provide teachers for each of the six recognized religions, if a sufficient number of pupils wish to attend. Public school religion teachers are nominated by a committee from their religious group and appointed by the Minister of Education of the respective community governments. Private authorized religious schools that follow the same curriculum as public schools are known as "free" schools. They receive community government subsidies for operating expenses and buildings. Teachers, like other civil servants, are paid by their respective community governments.

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. These criteria are not listed in decrees or laws, and the Government does not formally define "sufficient," "long period of time," or "social value." A religious group seeking official recognition applies to the Ministry of Justice, which then conducts a thorough review before recommending approval or rejection. Final approval of recognized status is the responsibility of Parliament alone; however, 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.

On November 7, 2006, a committee of experts appointed by the Justice Minister made some recommendations for amending the financing system. They refrained

from advocating a complete overhaul, pointing out that a system whereby the individual taxpayer would make a contribution to the religious group of his choice, might violate the Constitution and the prevailing privacy laws. Also on November 7, 2006, Cardinal Godfried Danneels, head of the Belgian Catholic Church, publicly acknowledged that the financing system in place discriminated in favor of the Catholic Church, adding that he would not resist the change.

On March 30, 2007, the Federal Government reached agreement on the text on a draft bill aimed at recognizing Buddhism as a "non-confessional philosophical community." The Government had not set a date for submitting the bill to Parliament, which was dissolved in May prior to elections in June. The Justice Minister announced that the Buddhist national secretariat would receive subsidies and ministers would receive pay starting in 2008. No progress was reported on the Government's talks with the Armenian Church on the possibility of recognition. Talks continued with other small religious communities on ways to provide state financial support. The lack of recognized status does not prevent a religious group from practicing freely and openly. Thus, while unrecognized groups do not qualify for Government subsidies, they may qualify for tax-exempt status as nonprofit organizations.

On November 19, 2006, Flemish members of the Muslim Executive, a 17-member committee which acts as one of the primary liaisons between the Muslim community and the Government, asked that the Executive be split into two separate executives. The members argued that the Executive, which is comprised of separate Flemish and Francophone wings, was spending too much time on issues in Francophone areas. The Flemish members argued to Justice Minister Onkelinx that two separate executives would allow each to operate more independently and therefore spend more time on issues relevant to their respective areas. The last elections for the Executive were held in 2006, a year after the Executive Council was created by the Muslim Council. Beyazgul Coksun was elected chairman and both the Flemish and Francophone wings have a vice chair. The Muslim community received official recognition from the Government in 1974.

At the end of 2006 both the Flemish and Francophone community governments were considering how to train imams for religious teaching. The two governments set as benchmarks academic training at the same level as for the ministers of the other recognized religious groups, and training dispensed in association with the Muslim Executive Council.

In 2005 the Antwerp Appellate Court, the highest court to address the issue, ruled it was outside the jurisdiction of the state to determine whether the Muslim faith requires women to wear a headscarf.

In 1993 the Government established by law the Center for Equal Opportunity and the Struggle against Racism (CEOOR). Commonly known as the Anti-Racism Center, it is an independent agency responsible for addressing all types of 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.

In March 2006 the Ministry of Justice introduced a mechanism to identify offenses of racist, xenophobic or homophobic actions, thus making it easier to prosecute discrimination as a criminal act. The Minister decided to appoint a magistrate in each judicial district in charge of monitoring racism and discrimination cases. In addition, the College of Prosecutors General, a Government body on which senior prosecutors serve, issued a directive on identifying violations of anti-racism and anti-discrimination legislation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, Parliament, the courts, police, Government agencies and special interest groups continued to research and monitor religious groups that are not on the official list of recognized religions.

As a result of a 1997 parliamentary commission committee report, Parliament passed a law establishing two bodies: a group monitoring "harmful sects" and an interagency coordinating group on "harmful sects." The first body, the Center for Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN), collects publicly available information on a wide range of religious and philosophical groups and provides information to the public and, upon request, gives advice to the authorities on sectarian organizations. Since its inception, the CIAOSN has opened 750 files concerning sectarian organizations. The Center's library is open to the public and contains information on religion in general, as well as on specific religious groups, including information provided by those groups. The Center has the authority to share with the public any information it collects on religious sects; however, it does

not have the authority to provide assessments of individual sectarian organizations to the general public. Despite its name, regulations prohibit it from categorizing any particular group as harmful. Unlike the Anti-Racism Center, this body cannot initiate litigation.

The second body established by Parliament, the Interagency Coordination Group, deals primarily with confidential material and works with the legal and security institutions of the Government to coordinate Government policy. Through a 2005 Royal Decree the group's composition was changed to include representatives from the College of Prosecutors General; the Federal Prosecuting Office; the Federal Police; State Security; Defense Intelligence; and the Justice, Interior, Foreign, and Finance Ministries. The Coordinating Group's executive board meets quarterly and reports to the full group. It produces no publicly available reports. The Government designated the federal prosecutor and a magistrate in each of the 27 judicial districts to monitor cases involving sects.

Regarding the Interagency Coordination Group, a parliamentary committee, the Parliamentary Investigatory Committee on Sects (PICS), found that the Government had failed, together with the College of Prosecutors General, to determine the official guidelines for prosecuting offenders. Created in 2002 the Federal Prosecuting Office is handling several cases involving sectarian organizations that formally remain open but on which no action has been taken for several years, and the Office has not yet issued any injunctions. Moreover, Parliament was undecided about amending the criminal code to include a special section on "offenses committed by sectarian organizations." In the absence of such special legislation, sectarian organizations can be investigated on such grounds as embezzlement, money laundering, abuse of confidence, misappropriation of wills, illegal medical practice, and fraud.

On June 1, 2006, the country's highest court ruled that Parliament's immunity could not be subjected to restrictions, after the President of the Chamber of Representatives argued that a 2005 ruling, regarding damages the Church of the Kingdom of God suffered by appearing in a parliamentary report, undermined the legislative authority and independence of lawmakers.

On December 12, 2006, the Brussels Appellate Court ruled that the Interior Minister had wrongly denied a visa to Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church. It ordered the Immigration Office to issue a visa, allowing Mr. Moon to attend a rally in the country.

Most queries handled by the CIAOSN in 2006 concerned physical welfare and therapeutic organizations (15 percent), Protestant denominations (13.5 percent), Oriental religious groups (10.5 percent), small religions (6 percent), New Age (6 percent), Scientology (5.5 percent), Catholic and dissident Catholic organizations (4 percent) and Jehovah Witnesses (4 percent).

In keeping with trends seen across Europe of role reversal of 19th-century missionary activity, PICS mentioned in its 2006 report, an increasing number of queries about organizations originating from Northern American Protestant and African evangelical movements.

PICS noted that since it was established in 1999 the queries coming from the public had shifted from sectarian organizations to those offering mental and physical healing, generated by a rapidly growing number of groupings and organizations, often hard to identify.

In its recommendations, PICS also requested that brainwashing and mental manipulation be established as criminal offenses. In keeping with the committee's recommendation, the Government submitted to Parliament draft legislation aimed at including an additional chapter in the criminal code regarding "abuse of an individual's ignorance or weakness." Parliament took no action on the bill before its dissolution, meaning that the measure will have to be re-submitted when the new legislature convenes after the 2007 general election.

In its 2006 report PICS reported no changes regarding State Security, which monitors sectarian organizations. In 2005 the committee reported that, in their view, State Security had violated the privacy of an individual; however, they found that State Security was right to warn child care organizations about one sectarian organization.

On several occasions in 2006 and 2007, a member of parliament raised concern about a company having provided computer courses to Belgian ministerial departments and the Flemish regional parliament. He alleged that the company was linked to the Church of Scientology International (CSI). He also expressed concern about Narconon, an organization linked to CSI that seeks to enter schools with an anti-drugs campaign.

According to the Federal Prosecuting Office, the 2004 criminal investigation into the Belgian Church of Scientology's operations was completed, but the magistrate who announced the decision did not mention precisely when this had occurred. The

federal prosecuting authorities made no official statements regarding the start of a trial date by the end of the reporting period.

As they are not one of the recognized religions, the Mormons had in the past expressed some concern about the status of their local workers. The informal agreement under which a number of missionaries are allowed to operate in the country is an item for discussions with the new Federal Government which will be formed following the 2007 general election.

In June 2006 the Brussels Appellate Court ruled in a summary trial that the CIAOSN had wrongly identified Sahaya Yoga as a dangerous sect in one of its publications. The court ordered the CIAOSN to make public the ruling and to inform its Web site and annual report readers, which it is doing during the period covered by this report.

On April 19, 2006, the Brussels First Instance court sentenced Luong Minh Dang, the founder of Spiritual Human Yoga (SHY) and his former representative in the country to 4 years' imprisonment, with a suspended sentence for half of its term, and a $2,600 fine (2,000 €) for forgery, swindling, illegal use of medicine and criminal conspiracy. The trial concerned the two defendants personally, not SHY as an organization. The court issued an international arrest warrant against Mr. Dang who had left the country. The defendants appealed the court ruling, making the case ongoing during the period covered by the report.

During this reporting period, contrary to previous years, there were no reports in Flanders or elsewhere of Jehovah's Witnesses being discriminated against by courts in child custody proceedings.

On January 11, 2007, the Charleroi Chamber of Indictment formally indicted an Aramaic Catholic priest for violation of anti-racism legislation in connection with remarks the priest made against Islam on television in 2002. On April 2, 2007, a higher court refused to quash the indictment.

On January 15, 2007, a measure banning the wearing of headscarves by municipal employees engaged in dealing with the Antwerp public came into effect, during the course of negotiations on formation of a coalition to govern the city. The measure prompted a protest by local trade unions, but remained in force. The Brussels regional government issued a similar ban for all its employees, but the decision caused no protest. Faced with the same issue, the municipal authorities in Ghent decided against issuing a directive on the subject. The issue did not arise at the federal level, where there are no specific directives on wearing religious symbols, with the notable exception of judges, police officers, and other uniformed officials.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community registered 66 anti-Semitic incidents during 2006, compared to 60 incidents during the previous year. (Data was unavailable for the complete reporting period.) The Center for Equal Opportunity and the Fight against Racism counted 63 incidents in 2006. In 2006 most incidents took place in Brussels (30) and in Antwerp (10) (with the remaining elsewhere in the country). Reports noted that physical violence decreased in 2006, while there was a significant increase in ideological incidents, such as shouting abuse and anti-Jewish graffiti. As in the past, most of the incidents appeared to have been generated from the Muslim immigrant community.

On June 15, 2007, a trial resumed against Roeland Raes, a former vice chairman and senator of the far-right Vlaams Blok party. The proceeding started in March 2007 and charged Mr. Raes with denying the Holocaust during a 2001 television broadcast. Federal law prohibits public statements that incite national, racial, or religious hatred, including denial of the Holocaust. The maximum sentence for Holocaust denial is a 1-year imprisonment.

On March 2, 2007, a Hasselt judge handed down a sentence stipulating community service or alternatively 7 months imprisonment to a man who spat and shouted anti-Semitic abuse at Israeli players during a 2005 soccer match between Belgium and Israel.

On November 30, 2006, a group of Chasidic teens from Antwerp was attacked by young Muslims in northeast Belgium. The group of 60 13- to 15-year-olds arrived at their hotel in Beringen, in a largely Muslim neighbourhood, when 10 local Muslims approached them and threw stones and shouted anti-Semitic epithets. Leaders of the Jewish group called the police. Undeterred by the arrival of the police, the

youths continued throwing stones at the building. The attackers appeared in a district court and were sentenced to community service.

CEOOR also reported an increase in anti-Semitic incidents due to the July–August conflict involving Israel and Hezbollah. Before the war the organization received one or two complaints of anti-Semitism per week; after hostilities commenced they received about one complaint per day. The complaints generally involved Internet hate messages and anti-Semitic letters and articles in the press. In addition, CEOOR reported anti-Semitic graffiti on Jewish homes and insults against Jews on the streets. An official investigation was under way at the end of 2006 to determine responsibility, but had yet to be completed by the end of the reporting period.

On the evening of July 24, 2006, vandals destroyed documents, windows, and the memorial's crypt of the National Monument for the Jewish Martyrs of Anderlecht. The crypt included an urn containing ashes from Auschwitz, which vandals damaged and emptied. The memorial, in the Anderlecht quarter of Brussels, was a previous target of desecration. There were no reported arrests but the investigation continues, according to authorities.

On July 5, 2006, a young man of North African origin yelled anti-Semitic insults while passing two Jewish boys who were walking outside the yeshiva (Talmud school) in Wilrijk (Antwerp). The North African man returned shortly later with some friends to assault the Jewish boys. One boy was badly hurt and the other boy escaped. The perpetrators were not found despite a police investigation.

Observers noted that courts in the country were becoming less lenient on anti-Semitic offenses and that an increasing number of judges had taken such cases. Legislation passed in March 2006 has made it easier to prosecute anti-Semitic acts, along with other forms of racism and xenophobia.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Some religious groups reported incidents of discrimination, particularly against Jews and Muslims, as well as religious groups that have not been accorded official "recognized" status by the Government.

In 2006 CEOOR received a total of 75 complaints citing religion as the basis of the alleged discrimination. These religion-based cases represented 5 percent of all complaints.

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, Catholic dioceses established commissions for interfaith dialogue. The president of the National Ecumenical Commission, a Catholic organization, maintains contacts with leaders of other religious groups, including both recognized and unrecognized religious groups.

Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), each acting in a private capacity, are also active in promoting religious freedom. Among the most prominent are the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia; the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme; Human Rights without Frontiers; and the Liga voor Mensenrechten.

Although opposition to bans against head scarves and burqas had a vocal following, support for bans remained widespread and popular. That said, the issue was not a major topic during the campaign preceding the June 10, 2007, federal elections.

In 2005 the Center for Equal Opportunity issued a comprehensive report on public symbols of religious and philosophical convictions. The report found that neither the Flemish nor the Francophone educational authorities imposed restrictions, and it was left to individual schoolmasters to decide which symbols would be tolerated. Most schoolmasters in the country imposed a headscarf ban on both pupils and teachers. A survey released in 2006 showed that 90 percent of the schools in the Francophone community did not permit the headscarf. Schools on both sides of the country's linguistic border allow free days for attending religious festivals. Catholic educational institutions, the largest educational body in the country, allowed the wearing of religious symbols. Schoolmasters also refused to permit the use of religious objections against attendance of specific courses, notably including physical education classes.

On July 11, 2006, the appeal board of the Brussels public schools ruled against reinstating two teachers who had been dismissed for wearing a headscarf. The head of the Brussels public schools argued that his schools had to remain neutral in religious matters, and that the teachers had broken an agreement to follow the school system's dress policy when they had signed their employment contract.

As of November 2006, there were reportedly only two schools remaining in Antwerp that permitted Muslim girls to wear the headscarf, and immigrant rights

groups protested that the Federal Government should intervene, as Muslim girls were being deprived of their rights and the opportunity to have an education at the school of their choice. There is strong societal support to view education as an exclusively local or linguistic community issue, and as such, outside the Federal Government's authority. No federal intervention occurred during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

U.S. Embassy representatives frequently discussed religious freedom with officials from the Prime Minister's Office; with the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Social Integration, and Interior; with members of Parliament; and with regional and local officials.

Embassy officials expressed concern regarding anti-Semitic incidents and urged the Government to intensify its efforts to counter this trend. Following Embassy engagement with both federal and language community officials, and supporting the efforts of the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, the country formally joined the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research after resolving to deal with several funding issues after formation of a new Government in the summer of 2007.

The Embassy hosted individual interfaith events to encourage dialogue among citizens and with the U.S. Government. Embassy officials also met with representatives of both recognized and nonrecognized religions, particularly those that reported some form of discrimination during the period covered by this report.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The State Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the entity Constitutions of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS) provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in ethnically integrated areas or in areas where Government officials are of the majority religion; the state-level Law on Religious Freedom also provides comprehensive rights to religious communities. However, local authorities sometimes restricted the right to worship of adherents of religious groups in areas where such persons are in the minority.

Government protection of religious freedom declined, especially during the campaign period prior to the October 2006 national elections, due to selective legal enforcement and the indifference of some Government officials. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government was implementing the State Law on Religious Freedom to protect the rights of religious communities and create a Government registry allowing them to establish legal status.

Societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief and practice persisted. Religious intolerance directly reflected ethnic intolerance because of the virtually indistinguishable identification of ethnicity with religious background. Discrimination against religious minorities occurred in nearly all parts of the country. In some communities local religious leaders and politicians contributed to intolerance and an increase in nationalism through public statements and sermons. A number of illegally constructed religious objects continued to cause ethnic/religious tension and conflict in various communities. Religious symbols were often misused for political purposes.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from the four traditional religious communities and emerging religious groups as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and reconciliation. The U.S. Embassy supported religious communities in their efforts to acquire permits for funeral and burial services and the building of new religious structures. The Embassy assisted religious communities' activities regarding restitution of property and also helped small religious groups to obtain legal registration of their churches in BiH.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's territory is divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS), with a separate ad-

ministrative district in Brcko (Brcko District). The country has an area of 31,816 square miles and a population of 3.9 million.

There were no reliable Government statistics available on the membership of different religious groups. According to the U.N. Development Program's Human Development Report 2002, Muslims constitute 40 percent of the population, Serb Orthodox 31 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, Protestants 4 percent, and other groups 10 percent. Bosniaks are generally associated with Islam, Bosnian Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs with the Serb Orthodox Church. However, many persons who identify with a major ethnoreligious group are atheists or agnostics who do not regularly practice any religion. The Jewish community has approximately 1,000 believers and maintains a historic place in society by virtue of centuries of coexistence with other religious communities and its active role in mediating among those communities.

The rate of religious observance is relatively low among the traditional religious groups; however, some areas of significantly greater observance exist, such as among Catholic Croats in the Herzegovina region and among Bosnian Muslims in Central Bosnia. For many Bosnian Muslims, religion often serves as a community or ethnic identifier, and religious practice is confined to occasional visits to the mosque or significant rites of passage such as birth, marriage, and death. Nevertheless, religious leaders from the Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox communities claimed that all forms of observance were increasing among young 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 1992–95 Bosnian war. Younger believers who grew up in the post-Communist period also have more freedom to practice their religion and more access to religious education. Leaders from the three largest religious communities observed that they enjoyed greater support from their believers in rural areas of Bosnia than from those in urban centers such as Sarajevo or Banja Luka.

Ethnic cleansing during the 1992–95 war caused internal migration and refugee flows, which segregated the population into separate ethnoreligious areas. Increased levels of returns, which peaked in 2002, continued to slow significantly, leaving the majority of Serb Orthodox adherents living in the RS and the majority of Muslims and Catholics in the Federation. Within the Federation, distinct Muslim and Catholic majority areas remain. However, returns of Serb Orthodox adherents and Muslims in recent years to their prewar homes in western Bosnia and Muslims to their prewar homes in eastern Bosnia have shifted the ethnoreligious composition in both areas. For example, the prewar population of the eastern RS town of Bratunac was 64 percent Bosniak. In 1995 the population was almost completely Serb; in 2007, after the return of 6,500 Bosniaks, the population was 38 percent Bosniak. Similarly, in Prijedor Municipality in the RS, approximately half of the prewar Bosniak population of 49,500 returned, partially reversing the effects of ethnic cleansing. The number of Catholics returning to central Bosnia and the RS, as well as of Serbs returning to the Federation, was negligible.

There are eight muftis (Islamic scholars) located in major municipalities: Sarajevo, Bihac, Travnik, Tuzla, Gorazde, Zenica, Mostar, and Banja Luka. The more conservative Islamic communities in Bosnia are located in towns such as Travnik, Bocinja/Zavidovici, Tesanj, Maglaj, Bugojno, and Zenica. The 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 its greatest influence in the RS, with the most influential bishops residing in Banja Luka, Trebinje, and Bijeljina. The Jewish community, like most other small religious groups in Bosnia, including Protestants, has its strongest membership in Sarajevo. There are several small Christian denominations throughout the country.

Missionary activity is limited but growing. Some foreign missionaries preached forms of Islam that tend to be intolerant of other religions and other interpretations of Islam.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The State Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, respect for religious freedom declined due to selective legal enforcement and indifference of some Government officials, which allowed societal violence and the threat of violence to restrict the ability to worship of adherents of religious groups in areas where they are in the minority. On October 16, 2006, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees issued instructions for implementation of the Law on Religious Freedom, which

provides for freedom of religion, ensures legal status of churches and religious communities, and prohibits any form of discrimination against any religious community. The law also provides the basis for the establishment of relations between the state and religious communities.

The State Constitution safeguards the rights of the three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats), and by extension the three largest religious communities, by providing proportional representation for each group in the Government and in the armed forces. As a result of the governmental structure created by the Dayton Accords, parliamentary seats and most Government positions are apportioned specifically to members of the three "constituent peoples." These stipulations often result in constitutional discrimination against "others" and sympathizers of certain religious communities that do not fit neatly into the three groups. During the period covered by this report, members of the Bosnian Jewish and the Romani communities filed separate lawsuits before the European Court of Human Rights to address this discrimination against those considered "others" by the State Constitution. Their claims were not addressed during the reporting period.

Bosnia's state-level government does not officially recognize any religious holy days as an official holiday, and Parliament continued to disagree on a state law on national 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. In May 2007 the RS Constitutional Court overruled a Vital National Interest veto by Bosniaks in the RS Council of Peoples, thus enabling the RS National Assembly to pass the Law on Holidays in the RS, which includes observance of RS Day on January 9. Locally observed holy days include Orthodox Easter and Christmas in the RS, Catholic Easter and Christmas in Herzegovina, and Kurban Bajram and Ramadan Bajram in Sarajevo and central Bosnia. On January 27, 2007, BiH officially marked Holocaust Day for the first time and commemorated the day with a series of exhibitions, lectures, and discussions throughout the country.

The State Law on Religious Freedom governs religion and the licensing of religious groups, and it provides for the right to freedom of conscience and religion in Bosnia. It grants churches and religious communities legal status and allows them concessions that are characteristic of a nongovernmental organization (NGO). The law also creates a unified register for all religious groups within the Bosnian Ministry of Justice, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees is tasked with documenting violations of religious freedom.

According to the law, any group of 300 adult citizens may apply to form a new church or religious community with a written application to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice will issue a decision within 30 days of the application, and an appeal may be made to the Bosnian Council of Ministers. The law allows minority religious organizations to register legally and operate without unwarranted restrictions. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Alliance of Baptist Churches awaited registration confirmation.

Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remained powerful and continued to identify closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic group. Many political party leaders were former Communists who 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 were often decorated with religious icons, although few officials practiced religion in any meaningful sense. In recent years many Bosnians have turned to their respective religious leaders to fill the void left by politicians, who are perceived by the public as apathetic or corrupt. This enabled religious leaders to play an influential political role, often promoting nationalist platforms, in the 2006 national elections and subsequent Government formation as well as in political programs.

The lines dividing politics, ethnic identity, and religion were often blurred, particularly during the period prior to the 2006 national elections and during the public debate over proposed changes to the Bosnian Constitution. Some religious leaders became increasingly political and vocal in this period and used religious sermons and services for political campaign purposes. Political candidates courted religious leaders during the campaign season and were often photographed together in campaign propaganda and media reports. Religious leaders also used their position to influence the election outcome by encouraging their communities to vote for certain individuals or parties. For example, prior to the elections Bosnia's Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter that was read in every Catholic church on July 2, 2006, in place of the traditional Sunday sermon. The letter reminded believers of the importance of their vote and encouraged Croat parties to form coalitions so that no Croat vote would be wasted. It also urged them to oppose U.S.-brokered constitutional amendments "through which war horrors would be legalized and the Croat people

marginalized." During the preelection period, the media and others often criticized the head of the BiH Islamic community for his appearance at public events with presidential candidate Haris Silajdzic and for his public statements calling on Silajdzic to "write a new Constitution" so Bosniaks would honor him as they do wartime president Alija Izetbegovic.

The State Law on Religious Freedom reaffirms the right of every citizen to religious education. The law calls for an official representative of the various churches or religious communities to be responsible for teaching religious studies in all public and private preschools, primary schools, and universities throughout Bosnia. These individuals are employees of the municipality in which they teach but have been accredited by the religious body governing the curriculum. However, the law was not always fully implemented, particularly in segregated school systems or where there was political resistance from nationalist party officials at the municipal level. During the period covered by this report, the entity, cantonal, and municipal governments gave varying levels of financial support to the four traditional religious communities—Muslim, Serb Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish. Religious communities tended to receive the most funding in areas where their adherents were in the majority.

Religious education is largely decentralized, as is the education system generally. Public schools offer religious education classes, but with some exceptions, schools generally offer religious instruction only in the municipality's majority religion. By law, students (or their parents, in the case of primary school students) may choose not to attend the classes. However, students of the majority religion and sometimes also of minority religious groups faced pressure from teachers and peers to attend religious instruction, and most did so. Children who are reluctant to be singled out as different from their classmates often attend instruction of the majority religion, even if it is not the religion they practice at home. If a sufficient number of students of minority religious group(s) attend a particular school (20 in the RS, 15 in the Federation), the school must organize religion classes on their behalf. However, in rural areas there are usually no qualified religious representatives available to teach religious studies to the handful of minority students. Minority students are often widely scattered across remote areas, making it logistically difficult to provide classes even when a teacher is available. In the Federation's five cantons with Bosniak majorities, schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a 2-hour-per-week elective course. In cantons with Croat majorities, all Croat students attend the "elective" 1-hour weekly Catholic religion course for primary and middle schools. Use of religious symbolism by the majority group in art classes, such as minority children in Bosniak majority areas being tasked to draw mosques or those in Christian majority areas being asked to draw crosses, continued to be a problem.

Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, Visoko, Mostar, and Bihac, Muslim students may attend madrassahs. These Islamic secondary schools provide training for students who want to become religious officials as well as general education to prepare students for university studies. There is one Serb Orthodox secondary school in Foca. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, Zepce, Banja Luka, Bihac, and Zenica, students may attend Catholic school centers. Although primarily Croat, these schools are open to students of other ethnicities and religious groups. Some of these centers have both primary and secondary schools, and although the principals are priests, the majority of teachers are not religious officials. The curriculum is a combination of Bosniak and Croat curriculums used in the Federation.

Facilities also exist for the three largest religious communities at the university level. The Faculty of Islamic Sciences is located in Sarajevo, the Serb Orthodox Seminary in Foca in the RS, and two Catholic theology faculties (one run by the Franciscans and one run by the diocese) in Sarajevo.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restricted religious freedom and posed major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases local governments made improvements in protecting religious freedom; however, serious problems remained, including an atmosphere in which violations of religious freedom occurred. For example, local police rarely made arrests in cases of vandalism against religious buildings or violence and harassment against religious officials or believers. Successful prosecutions were extremely rare. Local police frequently alleged that juveniles, intoxicated individuals, or mentally unstable persons were responsible for these attacks.

Lack of uniform protection posed obstacles to safeguarding minority rights, despite improved police and judicial protection for minorities in some parts of the country. Ethnic quotas set for the recruitment of new officers into police academies

were observed, but reforms intended to establish a countrywide effective, professional, multiethnic police force failed. Police forces as well as entity and local governments frequently allowed or encouraged an atmosphere in which violations of religious freedom could take place. In some cases the reluctance of police and prosecutors to aggressively investigate and prosecute crimes against religious minorities remained a major obstacle to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. The appropriation of religious symbols and buildings for political purposes in combination with restrictions on religious services and ceremonies had a negative impact on interreligious dialogue and interethnic relations in many communities. Authorities of the majority religious or ethnic group often discriminated against those of the minority group in matters related to municipal services, including security and education.

Governments at the local level restricted religious services and ceremonies. In the eastern RS municipality of Bratunac, the Serb majority municipal assembly repeatedly denied a permit for the Islamic community to build a cemetery and memorial on its property surrounding a downtown mosque. Bosniak organizers hoped to bury 98 identified victims of a 1992 massacre in Bratunac in which more than 600 persons, including the local imam, were killed. Organizers planned to hold the burials at the mosque on May 12, 2007, the 15th anniversary of the massacre, but Serb veterans' associations and local residents protested the planned burials. The mayor and assembly denied the building permit, claiming that the proposed cemetery and memorial had not been envisioned in the town's urban plan. After more than a year of repeated requests and appeals from Bosniak organizers, the RS Government and the international community intervened, and the parties reached a last-minute agreement that enabled the burials to take place at a different location on the planned date.

Religious officials of Sarajevo's minority populations complained of discrimination by local authorities regarding the use of religious property, obstructionism in municipal services, and daily harassment such as the frequent towing of vehicles parked near churches and church offices.

In September 2006 in the eastern RS town of Zvornik, the Saint Sava primary school launched the new school year with a religious ceremony chaired by a Serb Orthodox priest in the presence of more than 100 Bosniak students and parents. The incident received strong condemnation from the Islamic community, Bosniak associations, and the RS Minister of Education and Culture, who called the decision "inappropriate." However, school officials saw no problem with the event and indicated that it was a 15-year tradition to begin the school year in this manner and that attendance was not obligatory.

There were a number of controversial and highly politicized cases involving the illegal construction of religious buildings or monuments on private or Government-owned land. In these cases the buildings or monuments were built to send a political message to minority believers about the dominance of the majority ethnoreligious group in that area, creating ethnic tensions and impeding the process of reconciliation.

An illegally constructed Serb Orthodox church remained on the land of a Bosniak returnee in the town of Konjevic Polje in the eastern RS, despite the RS Ministry of Urban Planning's 2004 decision that the church should be removed. On September 11, 2006, for the second consecutive year, the local Orthodox priest celebrated Mass in the church, which was attended by a large number of antagonists singing nationalist songs and wearing nationalist clothing. Local police were present, and there was no violence. In June 2007 RS and Serb Orthodox Church officials agreed in principle to relocate the church but had not found an alternate location by the end of the period covered by this report. A wooden Serb Orthodox church unlawfully built on private Bosniak-owned land in the town of Kotorsko continued to be the source of legal and ethnic conflict. Although deadlines were set by authorities for removal of the church, no action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

The presence of a large stone cross and cement foundations for the eventual addition of more crosses in the ethnically divided town of Stolac in Herzegovina also remained contentious. In 2004 Federation authorities ordered the removal of the cross and foundations; however, the removal was delayed pending the outcome of a 2004 lawsuit on the legality of the Federation Government's decision. In September 2006 the Federation Constitutional Court upheld the constitutionality of the law, and the Federation Ministry of Spatial Planning was able again to launch an initiative for removal of the cross and foundations. While the Federation Ministry of Spatial Planning had the legal authority to undertake such an initiative, it was reluctant to do so out of concern that the action would increase interethnic tensions during

the election year. In May 2007 members of a Bosniak NGO illegally destroyed the additional foundations, but the cross remained.

The country's four traditional religious communities all had extensive claims for restitution of property that the Communist government of the former Yugoslavia nationalized after World War II. The State Law on Religious Freedom provides religious communities the right to restitution of expropriated property throughout the country "in accordance with the law." A special multiethnic restitution commission completed its mandate and delivered a draft restitution law to the Council of Ministers in early 2007 for approval. However, as of mid-2007 no action had been taken, and many believed that the law would not be passed without changes. In the absence of any state legislation specifically governing restitution, return of former religious properties continued on an ad hoc basis at the discretion of municipal officials but was usually completed only in favor of the majority group.

Many officials used property restitution cases as a tool of political patronage, rendering religious leaders dependent on politicians to regain property taken from religious communities. Other unresolved restitution claims were politically and legally complicated. For example, the Serb Orthodox Church continued to seek the return of the building that housed the University of Sarajevo's Economic Faculty and compensation for the land on which the state parliament building is located. The Jewish and Muslim communities also asserted historic claims to many commercial and residential properties in Sarajevo. The Catholic community maintained a large number of similar claims in Banja Luka.

In May 2007 the Islamic community began proceedings against the RS city of Banja Luka seeking damages of approximately $1.1 million (1.5 million Bosnian convertible marks) for the wartime destruction of all mosques in the city. The Islamic community filed the original lawsuit in 2000 but began proceedings again when an out-of-court settlement failed because the city would not make the requested admission of guilt.

During the period covered by this report, the Federation municipality of Travnik partially complied with a 2003 decision by the Human Rights Chamber (renamed the Human Rights Commission of the Constitutional Court) ordering the municipal government to relocate a public school housed in a building formerly owned by the Catholic archdiocese. The municipality returned half the building to the archdiocese for use as part of its Catholic school center. However, the other half remained in use as a public school. The court ordered the public school to move out of the building by July 1, 2006, but by that date authorities had not allocated funding for a new school building, and the building remained in use as a public school.

Minority religious communities also encountered difficulty in obtaining permits for new churches and mosques. The Catholic Church continued to seek permission, first solicited in 2000, to build a new church in the Sarajevo neighborhood of Grbavica but complained that the local authorities, a Bosniak majority, refused to grant the permit.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Acts of anti-Semitism against the Jewish community were infrequent. Jewish leaders noted a tendency to mix anti-Israeli sentiment with anti-Semitism, as the general public and the media often failed to distinguish between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Public criticisms of Israeli policy during the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese conflict did not include specific anti-Semitic elements.

In May 2007 a planned concert by Croatian singer Marko Perkovic Thompson was cancelled by Croatian Catholic Charity Association organizers due to security concerns. Plans for the concert had provoked numerous protests from the Jewish community and others who believe that Thompson's lyrics glorify the Ustasha and Nazis.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders did not always take positive steps to promote religious freedom. Compared to the previous reporting period, attacks on religious objects and religious officials increased significantly, particularly in the campaign months before the national elections, during which nationalist rhetoric employed by certain political parties heightened religious and ethnic tensions.

Minority religious buildings, clerics, and communities bore the brunt of retaliation for discrimination and violence perpetrated by members of their religious/ethnic groups in areas where those groups constituted the majority. Because they are powerful symbols of religious identification and ethnicity, clerics and religious buildings were favored targets. Most religious leaders severely criticized violence and nationalism against their own group but could be less vocal in condemning acts against members of other groups. Those in the majority religious or ethnic group had an advantage in employment opportunities.

Discrimination remained a serious problem in the RS, particularly in the eastern part, and in Croat-dominated areas of the Federation; discrimination against non-Muslims appeared to worsen in some Bosniak-majority areas where more conservative Islamic communities resided. Sarajevo, the Bosniak-majority capital, preserved in part its traditional role as a multiethnic city; however, complaints of discrimination persisted. Some non-Muslims reported feeling isolated and marginalized in the capital.

The number of incidents against religious symbols, clerics, and property in all three ethnic majority areas increased, especially during the period immediately prior to the October 2006 national elections. Local police generally did not conduct serious investigations into such incidents. For example, in July 2006 unidentified perpetrators sprayed gunfire into a Muslim cemetery in Trebinje, damaging several tombstones. In the same month and city, unidentified persons also threw an explosive device at the home of a Bosniak returnee. When police concluded that the attacks were the pranks of local youngsters, the local Muslim community called for the dismissal of the police chief for not performing a full investigation. Similar reports of local police assigning blame for these incidents on pranksters, drunkards, or the mentally unstable were frequent.

There were a number of acts of violence and vandalism against Muslim religious targets throughout the country. In October 2006 a rocket-propelled grenade destroyed a large portion of the Jasenica Mosque near Mostar; this was the most severe attack since the end of the war. The Jasenica Mosque became a source of controversy when local Croats objected to its reconstruction on grounds that its new design violated a law permitting only reconstruction in the same style as the original prewar building. City officials ordered removal of the mosque, but the order had not been carried out before the attack. In September 2006 the Carsijska Mosque in Bosanska Dubica was also repeatedly vandalized. In August 2006 an explosive device was detonated at the grave of former president Alija Izetbegovic, destroying his tombstone and leaving a large crater at the grave.

Serb Orthodox sites were also targets of vandalism. In December 2006 unknown individuals stoned the Orthodox church in Kakanj, and in November 2006 several gravestones in the Orthodox cemetery in the village of Mioci were damaged. In August 2006 unidentified persons wrote threatening, anti-Serb graffiti on the Serb Orthodox church in Petrovo. Also in August unknown perpetrators damaged several tombstones and broke a large number of vases at the Orthodox cemetery in Ljubinici and broke windows and damaged the entrance door of the Orthodox church in Gracanica.

Catholic religious objects were also the targets of vandalism. In September 2006 unknown persons broke the glass on the entrance door to a Catholic church in the Sarajevo neighborhood of Grbavica. The church was the subject of controversy because the Catholic community had requested a permit to build a new church, which local authorities had yet to approve. Also in September, in the Orasje neighborhood near Tuzla, persons damaged the doors and windows of the cemetery chapel and moved religious statues.

Protestant churches also were vandalized. On Easter Sunday 2007 several churches in Sarajevo were burglarized and documents about the congregation, specifically the lists of those who had been baptized, were stolen. Some churches faced repeated break-ins and complained that the local police made no efforts to find those responsible but instead intimidated church officials by calling them in for lengthy interrogations.

There were some reports that Muslims were offered economic incentives to worship and/or dress in a way that was different from traditional Bosnian Muslim custom. There also were reports that Muslim women were offered financial incentives to wear the veil and to practice a strict interpretation of Islam.

The leaders of the four traditional religious communities participated in the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continued to operate despite occasional significant disagreements and funding constraints.

The Catholic and Orthodox bishops of the country continued to meet regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern. During the week of ecumenical dialogue in April 2007, the head of the BiH Catholic Church, Vinko Puljic, led a service at Sarajevo's

Orthodox cathedral, and the head of the BiH Serb Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Nikolaj, held a service at Sarajevo's Catholic cathedral.

The bishop of Mostar-Duvno-Trebinje-Mrkan Bishropic, Ratko Peric, met with the mufti of Mostar, Seid Effendi Smajkic, for the first time since the end of the war, and during Bajram Bishop Peric extended congratulations to Muslims in the region. Both events helped to reopen channels of communication in the country's most segregated city.

In September 2006 Serb Orthodox Bishop Vasilije and then-Minister for Human Rights and Refugees Mirsad Kebo negotiated to remove a Serb Orthodox church built on the site of a destroyed mosque in the eastern RS village of Divic. Although these negotiations marked a positive resolution to a controversial and longstanding conflict, the church had not been removed by the end of the period covered by this report.

In October 2006 experts from more than 15 states participated in a 3-day interdisciplinary conference on the research of the Holocaust in southeast Europe. The conference, held in Sarajevo, was the first of its kind in BiH.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from all four traditional religious communities and emerging religious groups in the context of its overall interfaith dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government supported the return of refugees, democratization, and protection of human rights throughout the country. The Embassy publicly criticized instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities or buildings and encouraged political leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to respond equally strongly. The U.S. Government continued its strong support for full implementation of the Dayton Accords and a politically moderate, multiethnic Government, a policy intended to improve respect for religious freedom in the country.

When the local alliance of Baptist churches encountered difficulties in registering 15 of its affiliated religious communities, the Embassy intervened on its behalf with the responsible officials at the Ministry of Justice.

The Embassy also continued to lobby for the adoption of a State Law on Restitution, which would assist religious communities in obtaining return of their former property.

The Ambassador met frequently with the principal religious leaders, individually and collectively, to urge them to work on interreligious dialogue and building a tolerant society. Other Embassy personnel regularly met with representatives of all religious communities to discuss religious freedom concerns and also sponsored events for outreach to religious communities. The Ambassador hosted an iftar for Bosnian Muslims, hosted the Interreligious Council on several occasions, and played a critical role in encouraging local, entity, and state officials to secure a positive outcome for the Bratunac burials on May 12, 2007. The Ambassador is also a member of the Executive Board of the Srebrenica Foundation, which oversees the continued development of the memorial and cemetery dedicated to the 1995 massacre of Srebrenica-area Muslim men and boys in Potocari.

The U.S. Government funded the development of the countrywide human rights and democracy courses taught in 50 percent of all Bosnian elementary and secondary schools. During the period covered by this report, such a course was also included in all private Bosnian Catholic schools.

To promote interreligious dialogue, the Embassy continued to engage in an active outreach program with the religious communities at all levels, including hosting speaking engagements by visiting U.S. academics and lecturers, meeting with faith-based charities, and supporting a university affiliation program between the University of Sarajevo and Arizona State University to establish a graduate program in comparative religious studies. The Embassy's Democracy Commission approved a project proposed by Bosnia's Interreligious Council to promote awareness and understanding of the BiH Law on Freedom of Religion and to create a system through which the council could condemn desecration against religious property and persons. Funding from the Support for East European Democracy program enabled the Embassy's School Connectivity Program to develop and offer two modules on "Islam and Democracy" and "Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Democracy" to religious studies teachers throughout the country. The Catholic Church also approved the development of a module on "Catholicism and Democracy."

BULGARIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law prohibits the public practice of religion by unregistered groups. The Constitution also designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the "traditional" religion.

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

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance, particularly in the media, of some religious groups remained an intermittent problem.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 42,855 square miles and a population of 7.7 million. The majority of citizens, estimated at 85 percent, identify themselves as Orthodox Christians. Muslims comprise the largest minority, estimated at 13 percent; other minorities include Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Gregorian-Armenian Christians, and others. Among the ethnic-Turkish minority, Islam is the predominant religion. Academic research estimated that up to 40 percent of the population is atheist or agnostic. Official registration of religious organizations is handled by the Sofia City Court; it reported that 12 new denominations were registered between February 2006 and February 2007, bringing the total number of registered religious groups to 85 denominations in addition to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC), an increase of more than 15 percent.

Some religious minorities were concentrated geographically. The Rhodope Mountains (along the country's southern border with Greece) are home to many Muslims, including ethnic Turks, Roma, and "Pomaks" (descendants of Slavic Bulgarians who converted to Islam under Ottoman rule). Ethnic Turkish and Roma Muslims also live in large numbers in the northeast of the country, primarily in and around the cities of Shumen and Razgrad, as well as along the Black Sea coast. More than half of the country's Roman Catholics are located in the region around Plovdiv. Many members of the country's small Jewish community live in Sofia, Rousse, and along the Black Sea coast. Protestants are dispersed more widely throughout the country. While clear statistics were not available, evangelical Protestant groups have had success in attracting converts from among the Roma minority, and areas with large Roma populations tend also to have some of the highest percentages of Protestants.

According to a 2005 report of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, only 50 percent of the 6 million citizens who identify themselves as Orthodox Christians participate in formal religious services. The same survey found that 90 percent of the country's estimated 70,000 Catholics regularly engage in public worship. Approximately 30 percent of Catholics belong to the Eastern Rite Uniate Church. The majority of Muslims, estimated to number 750,000, are Sunni; 50,000 are classified as Shi'a. The Jewish community is estimated at 3,500 and evangelical Protestants at 50,000. The report also noted that more than 100,000 citizens practice "nontraditional" beliefs. (Orthodox Christianity, Hanafi Sunni Islam, Judaism, and Catholicism are generally understood to be "traditional" faiths.) Forty percent of these "nontraditional" practitioners are estimated to be Roma.

Statistics reported by the Council of Ministers Religious Confessions Directorate reported slightly different figures, listing nearly 1 million Muslims and 150,000 evangelical Protestants, as well as 20,000 to 30,000 Armenian Christians and approximately 3,000 Jews.

Foreign missionaries from numerous denominations are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law prohibits the public practice of religion by unregistered groups. The Constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity, represented by the BOC, as the "traditional" religion, and the Government provided preferential 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 Denominations Act requires all religious groups other than the Orthodox Church to register in the Sofia City Court, which is also responsible for maintaining the national register of such groups. The act allows only legally registered

groups to perform public activities outside their places of worship. Article 36 of the act punishes "any person carrying out religious activity in the name of a religion without representational authority."

The Council of Ministers' Religious Confessions Directorate, formerly responsible for registration of religious groups, provides "expert opinions" on registration matters upon request of the Court. The Directorate also ensures that national and local authorities comply with national religious freedom legislation. In contrast with previous periods, the Directorate became more transparent and more responsive to denominations' concerns during the period covered by this report. All applicants have the right to appeal negative registration decisions to the Court of Appeals. Denominations reported a general improvement in the registration process since the court took over this responsibility in 2003. Some local branches of nationally registered denominations continued to experience problems with local authorities who insisted that the branches be registered locally, despite the fact that the 2002 Denominations Act does not require local formal registration of denominations. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that their branches had to wait up to 2 years before they could successfully register locally in Dimitrovgrad, Veliko Tarnovo, and Smolyan. These complaints were less frequent than in previous periods.

Article 8 of the act allows the courts to punish religious organizations for a variety of offenses by banning their activities for up to 6 months, banning the publication or distribution of publications, or canceling an organization's registration.

Concerns that the 2002 Denominations Act would make it hard for small religious denominations to register and function did not fully materialize. While the Council of Europe's 2003 review of the Act highlighted that the provisions for registration remained ambiguous, most religious groups reported that they successfully registered. However, some remained concerned that the act does not specify the consequences of failure to register or outline any recourse if a competent court refuses to grant registration.

Representatives of some evangelical Protestant churches reported problems in holding public meetings, particularly in the Dobrich and Varna municipalities.

The 4-year legal dispute surrounding leadership of the Muslim community remained unsettled, in part due to conflicting court decisions. In January 2006 the City Court issued official certificates of registration to rival Islamic parties in the dispute—to Nedim Gendzhev on January 25 and to Mustafa Alish Hadji on January 26. This allowed both sides to claim legal recognition and control of community funds. Previously, the Sofia City Court attempted to resolve the issue in May 2005 by formally registering Mustafa Alish Hadji as Chief Mufti. Rival Muslim leader Nedim Gendzhev then filed an appeal, and in December 2005, the Sofia Appellate Court ordered Gendzhev's registration as leader.

The 2002 Denominations Act designates the Metropolitan of Sofia as the patriarch of the BOC. The law prohibits any group or person who has broken off from a registered religious group from using the same name or claiming any properties belonging to that group. The Jubilee Campaign Report maintains that the law effectively outlaws the Bulgarian Orthodox "Alternative Synod" and makes it unlikely that the Alternative Synod would be recognized as a separate religious organization from the BOC.

The case of the Bulgarian Orthodox "Alternate Synod," filed after the 2004 forceful eviction of the movement's priests from churches, was pending before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) at the end of the reporting period. There were no developments in several smaller cases involving property disputes between the Orthodox Church and the Alternative Synod.

For most registered religious groups, there were no restrictions on attendance at religious services or on private religious instruction. Two BOC seminaries, a Jewish school, three Islamic schools, the university-level Islamic Higher Institute, a Muslim cultural center, a multidenominational Protestant seminary, and university theological faculties operated freely. Bibles, Qur'ans, and other religious materials in the Bulgarian language were imported or printed freely, and religious publications were produced regularly.

Schools offer an optional religious education course that covers Christianity and Islam. The course examines the historical, philosophical, and cultural aspects of religion and introduces students to the moral values of different confessions. All officially registered religious confessions can request that their religious beliefs be included in the course's curriculum. While the Ministry provides the course material for free to students, religious education teachers participating in the program are funded directly from municipal budgets.

The Office of the Chief Mufti also supports summer Qur'anic education courses.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While the state of religious freedom improved for some "nontraditional" groups, other groups continued to face limited discrimination and antipathy from local authorities, despite successfully registering through the Sofia City Court. Article 19 of the 2002 Denominations Act states that nationally registered religious groups may have local branches. The law does not require formal local registration of denominations, although some municipalities claimed that it does.

Some municipalities, such as Rousse, Shumen, Pleven, Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Blagoevgrad, and Kurdzhali, had local ordinances curtailing religious practices that have not been changed to conform to the 2002 Denominations Act. In most cases, these ordinances were not strictly enforced, although Mormon missionaries were prevented from distributing religious pamphlets in Plovdiv and Pleven.

The Ahmadi Muslim Organization reported that Blagoevgrad authorities obstructed its members' right to practice. On December 8, 2006, the local public prosecutor brought a case against the Ahmadi community for carrying out religious activities without proper national registration. The group resorted to registering as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) after its attempt to register as a religious group nationally was denied in 2005. The prosecution challenged the group's NGO status, claiming that the Ahmadis went beyond NGO boundaries by proselytizing and holding religious meetings. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period. Public Prosecutor Maria Zoteva of Blagoevgrad reportedly opposed the community, noting that it had already been denied registration and implying that the community was not an acceptable religion.

The Ahmadi community reapplied for national registration with the Sofia City Court, attempting to register as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. By law the Sofia City Court may request the opinion of the Religious Confessions Directorate (under the Council of Ministers), which may ask for the Chief Mufti's input. The Muftiship seemingly would not consent to any outside group registering as Muslims. The court case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. The expert statement of the Religious Directorate, released May 8, 2007, stated that the name Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was problematic because the court should not be involved in a theological dispute as to whether Ahmadis are Muslims. Additionally, the Directorate stated that registration of the Ahmadis would "lead to the rise and institutionalization of a very serious dissent in the Muslim community," and to the spread of an interpretation of Islam that is not traditional in the country.

Some local governments restricted certain forms of proselytizing. In Plovdiv local officials restricted Jehovah Witnesses from much of their proselytizing activity. Special regulations forbid public preaching; a church has the right to preach only in its own place of worship, otherwise individuals risk sanctions. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that police in Veliko Tarnovo required missionaries to present proof of registration before they could preach publicly. One member said that municipal police often stopped Jehovah's Witnesses who were conducting missionary activity, asked them to show their identity papers, and warned them to stop their activity. Unlike in previous periods, no missionaries reported being arrested or fined for proselytizing.

While municipalities such as Burgas, Plovdiv, Pleven, Pernik, Stamboliyski, Haskovo, and Targovishte had decrees prohibiting the offering of religious literature "on the streets and at the houses of citizens" or allowing religious literature only from the religious group registered by the municipality, during the reporting period some of these decrees were changed or softened.

Jehovah's Witnesses were rarely stopped while engaging in preaching activity; however, on May 24, 2007, police stopped and questioned a 14-year-old Jehovah's Witness preaching with an adult companion in Gorna Oryahovitsa. A local newspaper published an article accusing the group of breaking the law by using underage children to distribute "religious propaganda."

On April 25, 2007, police stopped two Jehovah's Witnesses preaching in Veliko Tarnovo and asked them to produce proof that they had the right to preach publicly. The police officers wrote a protocol and warned the two to discontinue their public preaching or there would be serious consequences.

Jehovah's Witnesses also reported that local authorities obstructed the construction of a meeting house in Varna; after a long battle, they gained permission to begin construction on May 7, 2007. After the municipality blocked the construction, the group took the case to court and won the lower court decision and the appeal. They reapplied to have the permit verified in March 2007, and after new complaints and a new refusal to grant permission to begin construction, the survey was finally verified on May 7, 2007.

The country's entry into the European Union on January 1, 2007, lifted visa restrictions for EU citizens, making it significantly easier for EU-member missionaries

to work in the country. In contrast with previous years, there were no reports of foreign missionaries being denied visas.

Local political and religious leaders in the Smolyan area alleged that local education authorities discouraged female students from wearing headscarves in public schools. An NGO filed a complaint with the Commission Against Discrimination (CPD) stating that the local policy effectively banned headscarves. While there is no formal national policy on religious symbols in schools, the Commission decided in August 2006 that school uniform requirements did not discriminate against female Muslim students.

There were no indications that the Government discriminated against members of any religious group in restitution of properties that were nationalized during the Communist period. However, the BOC, Catholic Church, Muslim community, Jewish community, and several Protestant denominations complained that a number of their confiscated properties had not been returned. For example, the Catholic Church reported that the Government was less responsive than in previous periods, with the courts refusing to restitute a few properties.

The Jewish community reported difficulties in recovering some restituted buildings, including a hospital in central Sofia and a former rabbi's house in Varna. After the Government formed a special commission in 2006 to review seven outstanding claims of the Jewish community, the commission's report, presented to the Prime Minister in October 2006, found that the community had valid claims and recommended that the Government either return the properties to the community or find comparable properties as compensation. The commission chose not to review the controversial 2005 court decision on the Rila Hotel, which held that the expropriation procedure was properly executed by the Communist government and that the community was not legally entitled to any further compensation. The Government and Shalom were working on resolving all outstanding restitution cases at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Constitution prohibits the formation of political parties along religious lines.

Military law does not allow religious groups to conduct any activity on military premises and prohibits ministering at any level within the armed forces. However, military personnel can attend religious events outside the barracks.

Minority religious groups complained they had no access to television to broadcast religious services or programs. One Protestant radio group was given a broadcast in 2002, but as of 2006 it had not been allocated a frequency. The case was taken to the Supreme Court.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Alternative Orthodox Synod continued to await a decision from the European Court of Human Rights on the case related to the 2004 forceful expulsion of its members from their parishes.

Protestants said that heavily Muslim areas with a majority ethnic Turkish population sometimes place restrictions on their worship. Protestant pastor Pavel Hristov, head of the Bulgarian Missionary Network, reported that in the town of Djebel, a church which failed to apply for a tax declaration in time was closed by the local court. The pastor claimed that the ethnic Turkish authorities were searching for an excuse to move against the church.

In July 2005 a Jehovah's Witness was fined by Plovdiv authorities for "distributing brochures with religious content," but on July 17, 2006, the Plovdiv District Court dismissed the penalty upon appeal. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that no members were fined for distributing religious literature 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.

Anti-Semitism

Dimitar Stoyanov, a member of the extremist political party Ataka and a new Member of the European Parliament as of January 1, 2007, stated that he opposed the "Jewish establishment" and was quoted saying, "There are a lot of powerful Jews, with a lot of money, who are paying the media to form the social awareness of the people. They are also playing with economic crises in countries like Bulgaria and getting rich."

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite initial fears that the 2002 Denominations Act would hamper religious organizations' ability to operate freely, the number of groups registered with the Government increased from 36 in 2003, when the Sofia City Court took over this responsibility, to 85 in 2007.

Some religious denominations reported that the Religious Confessions Directorate had become more active in assuring that national and local authorities respect and promoted religious freedom and that the national Government was more receptive to their concerns. For example, a Protestant group, the Bulgarian Chaplaincy Association, gained legal status on February 23, 2007. The association represents approximately 120 Protestant pastors and individuals mainly affiliated with the Church of God and Assemblies of God but also includes Baptists and Lutherans.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Relations between different religious groups generally remained civil and tolerant; however, discrimination, harassment, and public intolerance of some religious groups remained an intermittent problem. While human rights groups reported that societal discrimination against "nontraditional" religious groups continued to gradually lessen, it was not uncommon for the media to disseminate negative and derogatory stories about such groups. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reported a slight improvement with media, but Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report numerous print and broadcast media stories with negative, derogatory, and sometimes slanderous information about their activities and beliefs.

The Chief Mufti's Office reported several cases of mosque desecrations. On May 3, 2007, pigs' heads were hung on two mosques in Silistra. In late July 2006, a swastika was drawn on the wall of the mosque in Kazanluk; police identified the perpetrators as five teenagers who were part of a group of soccer fans spraying graffiti on buildings, apparently without political or ethnic motives. On July 26, 2006, the Kazanluk mosque was set on fire by a torch thrown through a window. On July 18, 2006, a window of the Banyabassi Mosque in Sofia was broken, and the door of a mosque in the town of Aytos was defaced with paint. The Chief Mufti's Office expressed concern that while the vandals were usually apprehended, they rarely received legal penalties or punishments. The National Assembly adopted a declaration condemning the escalating threats to religious tolerance and ethnic peace.

VMRO, a fringe political party, attempted unsuccessfully to disrupt a large gathering of Jehovah's Witnesses on April 28 and 29, 2007, in the city of Dobrich, and the municipality allowed the organization to go on with the event. A few weeks prior, on April 2, 2007, the VMRO succeeded in preventing a religious gathering of Jehovah's Witnesses in Varna, forcing cancellation of their contract with the Palace Cinema. Leading up to the April 28–29 gathering, local media outlets publicized VMRO views on Jehovah's Witnesses, citing the group's comments about the antisocial practices of Jehovah's Witnesses, their demands that the municipality stop the gathering, and threats to gather "members and sympathizers" as a sign of protest. After intervention from the Religious Confessions Directorate, the municipality of Dobrich provided Jehovah's Witnesses with enough police protection to assure that the event was not disrupted.

The Ataka party launched a campaign to silence the speakers on the Sofia Mosque, claiming that the invitation to prayer was disturbing persons in the capital's central area. On the request of the Sofia mayor, the Chief Mufti's Office promised to turn down the volume "if [it] exceeded the permitted limit."

In November 2006 some newspapers published articles alleging that the Ahmadi Muslims were terrorists and asserting that letting Ahmadis register was a threat to national security.

The investigation into the 2005 desecration of Turkish graves in Haskovo by three teenagers was ongoing at the end of the reporting period, and a case regarding the cancelled traineeship of a young female Jehovah's Witness student was pending in the Supreme Administrative Court.

SECTION IV. U.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 monitored religious freedom in contacts with Government officials, Members of Parliament (MPs), clergy and lay leaders of religious communities, and NGOs.

Embassy officers met with Orthodox leaders and clergy, senior and local Muslim leaders, religious and lay leaders of the Jewish community, and leaders of numerous Protestant and "nontraditional" denominations. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy remained closely engaged with Government officials, MPs, religious organizations, and NGOs concerning the 2002 Denominations Act. The Embassy also remained concerned with Government interference in the BOC schism and with reports of discrimination against "nontraditional" religious organizations. Embassy representatives met with various religious groups and Government entities regarding the restitution of properties and with Muslim leaders regarding Islamic extremism and the Muslim leadership dispute.

CROATIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

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

There were reports of sporadic vandalism, particularly in the war-affected areas, directed against Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) property.

The U.S. 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 21,831 square miles and a population of 4.5 million. The religious breakdown of the country is approximately 85 percent Roman Catholic, 6 percent Serbian Orthodox Christian, 1 percent Muslim, less than 1 percent Jewish, 4 percent other religions, and 2 percent atheist.

The statistics regarding religious affiliation correlate closely with the country's ethnic makeup. The Serbian Orthodox, predominantly ethnic Serbs associated with the SPC, live primarily in cities and areas bordering on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro. Most members of other minority religious groups reside in urban areas. Most immigrants are Roman Catholic ethnic Croats from Bosnia.

Protestants from a number of denominations and foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize, as do representatives of Asian religious groups. A variety of missionaries are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives financial state support and other benefits established in concordats between the Government and the Vatican. The concordats and other Government agreements with non-Catholic religious communities allow state financing for some salaries and pensions for religious officials through Government-managed pension and health funds. Marriages conducted by the religious communities having agreements with the state are officially recognized, eliminating the need to register the marriages in the civil registry office. The concordats also regulate public school catechisms and military chaplains.

In line with the concordats signed with the Roman Catholic Church and in an effort to further define their rights and privileges within a legal framework, the Government signed additional agreements with the following 14 religious communities: the SPC and the Islamic Community of Croatia in 2002; and 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, Reformed Movement of Seventh-day Adventists, Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, and Croatian Old Catholic Church in 2003.

Both the Jewish Community of Zagreb (ZOZ) and the more recently formed Bet Israel congregation sought a similar agreement with the state, and negotiations were under way between the Government and the two Jewish communities. The ZOZ earlier refused an offered agreement because of lack of progress on property restitution. An ongoing legal dispute between the two communities delayed the sign-

ing of the agreement that the Government proposed in December 2006. The dispute stemmed from the June 2006 registration of the Bet Israel congregation, which left the ZOZ in 2005. The ZOZ contested the Government's decision to register Bet Israel as a religious group on grounds that it did not meet the necessary legal requirements and filed a lawsuit to have the registration annulled. Bet Israel subsequently countersued, contesting ZOZ's qualifications as a religious organization. At the end of the period covered by this report, both suits were pending in the Zagreb Municipal Court.

The December 2005 case in which three religious groups—the Church of the Full Gospel, Alliance of Churches "Word of Life," and Protestant Reformed Christian Church—challenged the Government's refusal to conclude agreements to provide them benefits similar to those provided by agreements with the Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox, Islamic, and other communities remained pending in the Constitutional Court at the end of the period covered by this report.

The law broadly defines religious communities' legal positions and covers such matters 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, are left to each religious community to negotiate separately with the Government.

Registration of religious groups is not obligatory; however, registered groups are granted "legal person" status and enjoy tax and other benefits. The law stipulates that to be eligible for registration, a religious group must have at least 500 believers and be registered as an association for 5 years. All religious groups in the country prior to passage of the law in 2003 were being registered without conditions; religious groups new to the country since passage of the law must fulfill the requirements for the minimum number of believers and time as an association. At the end of the period covered by this report, 42 religious groups had been registered, and an additional 13 had applied for registration. Religious groups based abroad must submit written permission for registration from their country of origin. No specific licensing is required for foreign missionaries.

Restitution of all nationalized or confiscated property is regulated under the 1996 Law on Restitution of Property Expropriated During Yugoslav Communist Rule, as amended in 2002. As of mid-2007, only persons who obtained citizenship by October 1996 may file claims under the law. With regard to the period covered by the law, Government officials stated that a 1999 constitutional court decision has the effect of allowing claims relating to confiscations during the previously excluded period of World War II to be considered under the law's provisions. Noncitizens, including those who fled the country and lost their citizenship, are not allowed to file claims under the law and related regulations. At the end of the period covered by this report, an attempt to amend the legislation had not been approved.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government imposed no formal restrictions on religious groups, and all religious communities were free to conduct public services and to open and operate social and charitable institutions.

SPC officials reported that they had access to hospitals and prisons to provide pastoral care but complained that they encountered difficulties assessing the level of need for Serbian Orthodox religious care in both the military and the police structures. In April 2007 the Ministry of Defense offered the SPC a contract to appoint a Serbian Orthodox priest exclusively to the military; a response from the Ministry of Interior was pending at end of the reporting period.

Facilitating the return of refugees (primarily ethnic Serbs) remained a challenge for the Government, which nevertheless made progress in a number of areas relating to returns. However, some ethnic Serbs who wished to return to the country, including Serbian Orthodox clergy, continued to encounter difficulties or delays in resolving various administrative matters. SPC officials reported that the number of Serbian Orthodox clergy, down to 30 after the 1991–95 war, gradually rose and remained steady at approximately 130 in the period covered by this report. The increase was most pronounced in the Dalmatian and Karlovac eparchies, where return of refugees had been the most intense. SPC sources continued to complain that new priests, particularly in Knin, had to renew their temporary work permits and residency status at relatively short intervals. The lack of a more permanent status deprived them and their family members of health care benefits and pensions. The SPC raised the problem with the Government in December 2006; however, the Government continued to insist on the application of the standard procedure for issuance of work permits and residency documents and refused to give priests preferential status.

The Government requires that religious training be provided in public schools, although attendance is optional. Because 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, the Roman Catholic catechism is the predominant religious teaching offered in public schools. Schools that met the necessary quota of seven students of a minority faith per school allowed separate religion classes for the students. While noting progress in Knin regarding availability of religious education in the schools, SPC officials complained that requests to change the agreement and lower the minimum number of seven students per school were denied.

SPC officials continued to report that many schoolchildren and their parents, particularly in cities where Serbian Orthodox believers do not live in compact communities, remained reluctant to identify themselves as Serbian Orthodox to avoid being singled out.

Restitution of property nationalized or confiscated by the Yugoslav Communist regime remained a problem. Many religious communities identified property return as their top priority and complained about the lack of progress. The SPC was generally satisfied with the fact that it held three meetings with Government representatives on the joint state-church commission and subcommissions during the period covered by this report but complained that the meetings had only limited results. The SPC noted that the pace of property restitution continued to be minimal. Early in 2007 Metropolitan Jovan Pavlovic wrote to both the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to ask for an analysis and propose changes to the 1996 property restitution law. The law effectively annulled previous legislation and opened the possibility for the Government to resell previously nationalized property to new private owners, making restitution more difficult, according to the SPC.

SPC officials were particularly concerned about the lack of progress in restitution of several valuable business and residential buildings in downtown Zagreb, most notably the Zagreb Cinema building. The dispute worsened in January 2007 after a private developer, who bought the cinema in March 2006, announced plans to demolish the building and construct a new structure in its place. The SPC accused Zagreb city officials of secretly supporting the sale to the developer and undermining negotiations on its purchase. In February 2007 the SPC filed a lawsuit in the Supreme Court over excessively lengthy legal procedures, largely because its earlier lawsuit against the alleged wrongful privatization of the cinema property had been pending before the Administrative Court for 3 years. The SPC also continued with legal action initiated in 2004 against the owners of 40 previously SPC-owned (and later nationalized) apartments in Zagreb to prevent further sale of the units. The SPC also claimed land in the north of Zagreb. No progress was made in this area during the reporting period or in the return of properties that belonged to monasteries, such as arable land and forests.

Reconstruction of a number of Serbian Orthodox churches continued, and approximately 50 Serbian Orthodox churches and other religious buildings received money from the state budget for reconstruction projects. Most notably, the Ministry of Reconstruction almost fully funded the reconstruction of the landmark St. Nicholas Church in the center of Karlovac, which was demolished during the 1991–95 war. SPC officials commended this progress but pointed out that other than in Karlovac, these were mostly small investments and the funding allocated was insufficient for costlier reconstruction of some of their capital objects from the priority list presented to the Government 2 years previously.

The Roman Catholic Church had considerable success in receiving restituted property during the reporting period. During the latter half of 2006, church officials reported that an order of nuns received a property to be used as a house in Koprivnica; the Government also returned part of a monastery in Makarska, a cinema building in Rijeka, and a monastery on Badija Island. In September 2006 a Roman Catholic group received a property to be used as a home for mentally disabled children. The Government returned property on Mali Losinj to the Sisters of the Holy Cross and a building on the island of Pag to a Benedictine order. Also in the fall of 2006, the Djakovo Diocese received an abandoned hospital building in exchange for an undetermined property located elsewhere. Negotiations that began 4 years ago were temporarily stalled on the Government's offer of a 25 percent stake in the Croatia Osiguranje insurance company as compensation for unreturned property.

Several Jewish properties, including some buildings in Zagreb, were not returned during the reporting period. The Jewish community stated that the process of returning nationalized property in Zagreb, halted in 2005, had not progressed. In April 2007 the Jewish Community of Osijek reported the successful return of one commercial property. Other claims remained stalled in court.

The Islamic Community had no property claims. After several years of delays, in March 2007 a zoning plan was accepted for construction of a mosque in Rijeka. Plans existed to build a mosque in Osijek, but administrative procedures for rezoning the land delayed construction.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Acts of anti-Semitism were rare. In February 2007 a sugar company in Pozega produced and locally distributed sugar packets bearing an image of Adolf Hitler and containing offensive jokes about Holocaust victims in concentration camps. The State Prosecutor's Office reported in June 2007 that the case was under investigation.

In September 2006 a brochure prepared by the ZOZ in cooperation with Yad Vashem and the Visual History Foundation was published that analyzed primary and secondary school history textbooks. The authors—several prominent historians—criticized the lack of information concerning Jewish ethnic identity and culture and the genesis of anti-Semitism. Historians observed that existing textbooks implied that implementation of racist laws had no roots in the World War II-era NDH (Independent State of Croatia) but occurred exclusively under the influence of the Nazi-affiliated regime.

In July 2006 a private Web site in Pozesko-Slavonska County published an anti-Semitic satire involving the head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, prior to his visit to the country. The text also mocked the Pozega mayor's plans to reconstruct the Jewish cemetery and the Government's requests to speed up the extradition from Austria of an Ustasha commander formerly active in Pozega.

ZOZ leaders continued to complain about receiving threatening postcards.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Religion and ethnicity were closely linked in society, and religion often was used historically to identify non-Croats and single them out for discriminatory practices. This link contributed to the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s and to the perpetration of violence and intimidation against religious persons, institutions, and symbols of all religious groups. Such incidents occurred sporadically, and their frequency and gravity continued to decrease.

Human rights nongovernmental organizations and religious leaders noted that overall ethnic and religious relations remained stable. The exceptions were occasional incidents largely involving desecration and vandalism of SPC property, which remained most pronounced in the Dalmatian hinterland and Knin area. In February 2007 the tower of the Holy Archangel Monastery in Kistanje was severely vandalized immediately following its restitution to the SPC. At the same time, the monastery received a threatening letter containing offensive remarks against ethnic Serbs. In the same month, the fence of the Serbian Orthodox cemetery in Biljane Donje, north of Zadar, was torn down. The unidentified perpetrators lit fires and used a bulldozer to pile rubble on two grave sites prepared for future tombs. In Koprivnica in January 2007, vandals broke into the Holy Trinity Church, removed relics from the altar, and damaged a valuable prayer book. In Zadar in December 2006, unidentified persons sprayed Ustasha symbols and offensive graffiti referring to a Serbian Orthodox saint on the fence of the St. Ilija Church. SPC sources also reported that an unknown perpetrator lit a fire in front of the Serbian Orthodox diocese building. Police investigated but did not identify perpetrators in the cases.

St. George's Church, near Knin, was vandalized twice, once in October 2006 and again in December 2006. In August 2006 police investigated the theft of church bells from the St. Dimitrije the Martyr Church in Bjelovar and from another church in the village of Toranja near Pozega but identified no perpetrators. In Sibenik five teenagers barged into the Holy Assumption Church during Mass and unsuccessfully attempted to throw a flammable item inside the church.

In contrast with the previous report, the Islamic Community reported no violence or harassment toward religious persons or sites during the reporting period.

The Jasenovac Memorial Museum and Education Center opened in November 2006. Numerous Government officials, including the President, Prime Minister, and Speaker of Parliament as well as academic, religious, and diplomatic leaders attended the event. Representatives from the Simon Wiesenthal Center and several individuals from the Jewish community asserted that the new exhibits did not ap-

propriately reflect the horrors that took place in the camp or the ethnic makeup of the victims, predominantly Serbs. President Mesic and ethnic Serb Member of Parliament Milorad Pupovac indicated that the center was "a work in progress" with adjustments to be made in the future. Visiting U.S. experts from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum praised the new permanent exhibition.

In March 2007 Pozega Bishop Antun Skvorcevic became the first Roman Catholic bishop to visit Jasenovac when he led a delegation of 90 priests and deacons from the area to visit the new exhibit and pay respects to the victims. Skvorcevic later announced plans to begin holding ecumenical prayers in Jasenovac with representatives of other religious communities.

In April 2007 President Mesic spoke at the annual commemoration ceremony at the Jasenovac concentration camp. Representatives of Parliament, the Government, and national minorities as well as representatives of the Serbian Orthodox, Jewish, Islamic, and Roman Catholic faiths attended the ceremony.

In May 2007 Cardinal Bozanic spoke at the annual Bleiburg, Austria, commemoration of the 1945 execution of suspected Ustasha collaborators and a number of Croatian civilians by Yugoslav Communists. The move was potentially controversial because Roman Catholic Church leaders at that level had not previously attended commemorations for Ustasha victims in Jasenovac. While calling on the Government to investigate Communist crimes and identify the culprits, Bozanic for the first time publicly condemned Jasenovac as "the place of Ustasha crimes" and "the horrible execution ground and a place of inhumanity." One leading daily newspaper commended Bozanic for acting responsibly and having "directly demonstrated that all mass crimes are equally atrocious and cannot be justified." Croatian Helsinki Committee member Zarko Puhovski also welcomed Bozanic's words but added that balance would be achieved only if the cardinal attended the next commemoration for Holocaust victims in Jasenovac.

Zadar Archbishop Ivan Prendja supported reconciliation between ethnic Croats and Serbs in the Zadar area. In an August 2006 sermon at the inauguration of a reconstructed Franciscan monastery in the village of Karin, Prendja expressed hope that the monastery would become a place of coexistence between Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox 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. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy officials actively worked to encourage the Government to respect religious freedom in practice. In addition, Embassy officials met frequently at all levels with representatives of religious communities and minority groups to address human rights and religious freedom matters.

The Embassy continued its annual participation in summer training organized by the U.S. Department of State and the Association of Holocaust Organizations. In 2006 five high school history and sociology teachers traveled to the United States to participate in seminars on the Holocaust.

CYPRUS

The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Cyprus has an area of 5,747 square miles and a population in the Government-controlled area of 778,700.

Prior to 1974, the country experienced a long period of strife between its Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. In response, the U.N. Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) began peacekeeping operations in 1964. The island has been divided de

facto 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 administered by Turkish Cypriots. In 1983, their administration proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC"). The United States does not recognize the "TRNC," nor does any other country except Turkey. A buffer zone, or "green line," patrolled by UNFICYP, separates the two parts. In 2003 Turkish Cypriot authorities relaxed many restrictions on movement between the two communities, including abolishing all crossing fees. The new procedures led to relatively unimpeded contact between the communities and permitted Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to visit religious sites located in the other community; however, Cypriots, as well as foreigners, must show identification at the buffer zone crossing points to go from one side to the other.

According to the most recent (2001) population census, 94.8 percent of the permanent population in the Government-controlled area belongs to the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus. Additionally, 0.5 percent of the population is Maronite Catholic, 0.3 percent Armenian Orthodox, 1.5 percent Roman Catholic, 1 percent Protestant, 0.6 percent Muslim, and 1.3 percent atheist, "other," or "not stated."

There is a Buddhist temple in Nicosia and a synagogue in Larnaca. Both are attended primarily by expatriates and foreign residents.

A 1998 opinion poll indicated that 48 percent of Greek Cypriots regularly attended church services, while 49 percent attended only for major religious holidays and ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. The remainder did not attend religious services at all.

There is some Protestant missionary activity in the Government-controlled area.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution specifies that the Autocephalous 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 Church of Cyprus is exempt from taxes with regard to religious activity and, according to the law, is required to pay taxes only on strictly commercial activities. The Constitution also lays out guidelines for the Vakif, the Muslim institution that regulates religious activity for Turkish Cypriots, which similarly has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with its laws and principles. The Vakif, however, operated only in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots during the period covered by this report. No legislative, executive, or other act may contravene or interfere with the Orthodox Church or the Vakif.

Three other religious groups are recognized in the 1960 Constitution: Maronite Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, and "Latins" (Roman Catholics). These groups are also exempt from taxes and are eligible, along with the Church of Cyprus and the Vakif, for Government subsidies to their religious institutions.

The Government has constitutional and other legal bars against religious discrimination. The 1975 Vienna III Agreement remains the basic agreement covering treatment of Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots living in the Government-controlled area. Among other things, this agreement provides for facilities for religious worship. Religions other than the five recognized religions are not required to register with the Government; however, if they desire to engage in financial transactions, such as maintaining a bank account, they must register as a nonprofit organization. To register, a group must submit an application through an attorney that states the purposes of the nonprofit organization and provides the names of the organization's corporate directors. Upon approval, nonprofit organizations are tax-exempt and are required to provide annual reports of their activities. Registration is granted promptly. No religious groups were denied registration during the reporting period.

There are no prohibitions against missionary activity or proselytizing in the Government-controlled area. Foreign missionaries must obtain and periodically renew residence permits in order to live in the country; normally, renewal requests are approved.

The Government requires children in public primary and secondary schools to take instruction in the Greek Orthodox religion. Parents of other religions may request that their children be excused. These children are exempted from attending religious services and instruction.

The Ministry of Education postponed implementation of its February 2006 proposal to reduce the number of hours of religious instruction required in public schools from 2 hours to 1 hour per week. The Church of Cyprus and other religious organizations strongly objected to the proposal; the Ministry postponed implementation to allow public debate and discussion; however, it did not schedule such debate and discussion during the reporting period.

The Government of Cyprus recognizes the following holy days as national holidays: Epiphany, Annunciation, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Holy Spirit Day (Pentecost), Assumption, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Since 2003, when restrictions of movement to the northern part of the island were relaxed, Greek Cypriots as well as other religious groups have reported better access to religious sites in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. Turkish Cypriots enjoyed relatively easy access to religious sites in the Government-controlled area.

The Government reported that it spent $173,272 (€130,280) in 2006 for the conservation of 17 mosques and other Muslim places of worship in the area under its control. The 2007 budget for the same project was $462,414 (€347,680).

Missionaries have the legal right to proselytize, but the Government closely monitors missionary activity. It is illegal for a missionary to use "physical or moral compulsion" to make religious conversions. The police may investigate missionary activity based on a citizen's complaint. They may also open an investigation if missionaries are suspected of being involved in illegal activities that threaten the security of the republic, constitutional or public order, or public health and morals.

Conscientious objectors, including those for religious reasons, are exempt from active military duty; however, they are legally required to complete an alternative military service and perform reservist duty in the Greek Cypriot National Guard (GCNG). The Independent Authority for Investigating Complaints and Allegations against the Police closed an investigation that resulted from a May 2006 nongovernmental organization (NGO) complaint filed with the Authority and the Ombudsman regarding police treatment of Muslim asylum seekers. The NGO had reported complaints from political asylees of Muslim origin who had difficulty securing employment because of their religion. Several women also reported that potential employers did not like their headscarves. Another asylee alleged he could not secure housing due to his Muslim faith. The Ombudsman' Office did not proceed with an investigation because it could not locate one of the complainants. The Independent Authority asked the NGO for additional information, which the NGO was unable to produce. As a result, the Independent Authority closed the investigation.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

On February 21, 2007, Church of Cyprus Archbishop Chrysostomos II and the Turkish Cypriot Head of Religious Affairs, Ahmet Yonluer, met at the Ledra Palace Hotel for what was the first meeting of the communities' religious leaders in the past 33 years.

On July 3–5, 2006, Cyprus cohosted with Malaysia the second Asia-Europe Meeting Interfaith Dialogue, which sought to promote greater understanding between different religions and to help combat terrorism.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Relations between the Church of Cyprus and other religious communities in the Government-controlled area were cordial.

In May 2007 an NGO reported that it continued to receive complaints from recognized political asylees of Muslim origin who had difficulty securing employment because of their religion. An Iranian asylee alleged that he was fired from his position

at a major television station that has strong links with the Church of Cyprus when he mentioned that he was Muslim.

In April 2007 court proceedings began for 13 suspects charged with attacking Turkish Cypriot students. On November 22, 2006, 15 to 20 Greek Cypriot teenagers, believed to be members of an ultranationalist group, National Voice of Youth with a Greek Soul, entered the English School in Nicosia and attacked a group of Turkish Cypriot students, causing minor injuries. Reports in the Greek Cypriot press about an earlier incident at the same school, which reported that an 11-year-old male Turkish Cypriot student verbally insulted a Greek Cypriot student wearing a Christian cross, were blamed for inciting the latter event. The Government condemned the November 22 attack as an aberration, not indicative of a broader atmosphere of discrimination or racial hatred against Turkish Cypriots.

Although Turkish Cypriots occasionally reported that unused mosques in the Government-controlled area have been vandalized, the Government of Cyprus routinely maintains and repairs them.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

AREA ADMINISTERED BY TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Since 1974, the northern part of Cyprus has been administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities. It proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") in 1983. The United States does not recognize the "TRNC," nor does any other country except Turkey.

The basic law in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots refers specifically to a "secular republic" and provides for freedom of religion. However, the politically divisive environment on Cyprus engendered some restrictions on religious freedom, particularly for Greek Cypriots and Maronites.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Turkish Cypriot authorities during the reporting period, and Turkish Cypriot policies continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

According to a population count in April 2006, the population in the area was estimated at 265,100. Ninety-eight percent of this population is, at least nominally, Sunni Muslim. An estimated 4,000, mostly immigrant workers, are Alevis, "followers of Ali," who follow a strand of Shi'a Islam with some pre-Islamic influences; there are also smaller numbers of followers of other schools of Islam. There is a small Turkish Cypriot Baha'i community. Most non-Muslims residing in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots are foreigners from Western Europe who are generally members of the Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches. Approximately 10 percent of the population in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots attends religious services regularly.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The "TRNC Constitution" provides for freedom of religion, and Turkish Cypriot authorities generally respected this right in practice. Turkish Cypriot authorities at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by the authorities or private actors.

The "law" does not recognize any specific religion. However, it states that the Vakif, 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 Vakif laws and principles. The Vakif is tax-exempt in its religious activities, but its commercial operations are subject to applicable taxes. It also receives subsidies. No other religious organization is tax-exempt or receives subsidies. The Vakif is the largest landowner in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Turkish Cypriot authorities bar religious discrimination. The 1975 Vienna III Agreement is the basic agreement covering treatment of Greek Cypriots and

Maronites living in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots living in the Government-controlled area. Among other things the agreement provides for facilities for religious worship, stating that, "the Greek Cypriots at present in the north of the island are free to stay and they will be given every help to lead a normal life, including facilities for education and for the practice of their religion, as well as medical care by their own doctors and freedom of movement in the north."

In March 2007 a second priest was finally appointed to serve the enclaved community of Ayia Triada in the Karpass region, after the Government requested in 2005 that a second Church of Cyprus priest be assigned to minister to the enclaved Greek Cypriots living in the Karpass region of the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. Turkish Cypriot authorities had objected to the proposed candidate, claiming he disliked Turkish Cypriots and had made inappropriate statements about their community.

Religious organizations are not required to register with 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 was rare.

There is instruction in religion, ethics, and comparative religions in two grades of the primary school system; however, it is not compulsory. There is no formal Islamic religious instruction in public schools, and there are no "state-supported" religious schools.

The following holy days are observed widely in the Turkish Cypriot community: Kurban Bairam, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Ramadan Bairam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Greek Cypriot Orthodox and Maronite Catholics were prohibited from visiting religious sites located in military zones in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. They were allowed to conduct Mass on a regular basis, without prior permission, at seven sites in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots so designated by the Turkish Cypriot authorities; prior permission was required to conduct Mass at the other estimated 500 religious sites in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Turkish Cypriot authorities gave permission for an Orthodox Mass to be held at the Armenian Sourp Magar Monastery in Kyrenia/Girne on May 6, 2007, the first time since the 1974 division of the island. Turkish Cypriot authorities also gave permission for a Catholic Mass at the Maronite Prophet Elias Monastery outside of Ayia Marina/Gurpinar on July 23, 2006, also the first time since the division of the island. For the fourth consecutive year, Turkish Cypriot authorities permitted a Greek Orthodox Mass at St. Barnabas Monastery, near Famagusta, on June 10–11, 2007. On September 1–2, 2006, Turkish Cypriot authorities, for the third consecutive year since the opening of the crossing points in 2003, gave permission for a Greek Orthodox Mass to be held in Ayios Mamas Church near the town of Morphou/Guzelyurt. Unlike in previous years, there were no incidents directly before or during the Mass.

During the period covered by this report, Turkish Cypriot authorities completed the restoration of five Orthodox churches in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

The U.S. Agency for International Development, through a program implemented by the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) and with the approval of Turkish Cypriot authorities, began a stabilization and restoration project at the Maronite Prophet Elias Monastery to prevent further deterioration. Turkish military objections to traffic along the restoration road, which cut through a Turkish military installation, halted the project, but the Turkish Cypriots and UNDP agreed to clean up the site and fence off the monastery to prevent damage.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

On February 21, 2007, Turkish Cypriot Head of Religious Affairs, Ahmet Yonluer, met with Church of Cyprus Archbishop Chrysostomos II at the Ledra Palace Hotel for what was the first meeting of the communities' religious leaders in 33 years.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Greek Cypriots continued to report that vandals damaged vacant Greek Orthodox churches and removed religious icons in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots; there were no reported law enforcement investigations of these incidents. According to Turkish Cypriot leaders, in response to complaints of vandalism, some locations were fenced for their protection.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with Turkish Cypriot authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

CZECH REPUBLIC

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

There were some reports of societal discrimination based on religious belief. Occasional acts of anti-Semitism were reported among some elements of the population.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 30,442 square miles, and a population of 10.2 million. The country had a largely homogenous population with a dominant Christian tradition. However, in part as a result of 40 years of Communist rule between 1948 and 1989, the vast majority of citizens did not identify themselves as members of any organized religion. In a 2007 opinion poll sponsored by the Stredisko Empirickych Vyzkumu (STEM) agency, 28 percent of respondents claimed to believe in God, while 48 percent identified themselves as atheists. Only 18 percent of Czechs under 29 professed a belief in God. Similarly, in a May 2007 poll by the Public Opinion Research Centre (Centrum pro vyzkum verejneho mineni, or CVVM), 55 percent of Czechs voiced a mistrust of churches, while only 28 percent stated that they trust them. 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 fell steadily since then in every region of the country.

Five percent of the population attends Catholic services regularly, and most of these live in the southern Moravian dioceses of Olomouc and Brno. One percent of the population is practicing Protestants. Islam was registered as an officially recognized religion in 2004, and leaders of the local Muslim community estimated that there are several thousand Muslims in the country. There is only one mosque, located in Brno, but prayer rooms are scattered throughout the country. The vast majority of the country's historic Jewish community, which numbered approximately 100,000 before the Nazi occupation of the area of today's Czech Republic, was killed during the Holocaust. There were approximately 3,000 persons officially registered as members of the Jewish community. Judaism is an officially registered religion because of its recognition by the state before 1989.

Missionaries of various religious groups were present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 tax benefits and government subsidies from the state, although some decline to receive state financial support as a matter of principle and as an expression of their independence.

Recognized national holidays are Easter Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day (December 26) and do not have an evident negative affect on any religious group.

There are 26 state-recognized religious organizations. In 2004 the Center of Muslim Communities was officially registered, gaining first-tier status; this was the first such registration of a Muslim organization in the country. In 2004 the Constitutional Court denied an appeal by the Unification Church to overturn their denial to register in 1999. The Armenian Apostolic Church withdrew its application for registration at the end of 2006.

The 2002 law on Religious Freedom and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations created a two-tiered system of registration for religious organizations. To register at the first (lowest) tier, a religious group must have at least 300 adult members permanently residing in the country. First-tier registration confers limited tax benefits and imposes annual reporting requirements, as well as a 10-year waiting period before the organization may apply for full second-tier registration. To register at the second tier, a religious group must have membership, with the requisite signatures, equal to at least 0.1 percent of the country's population (approximately 10,000 persons). Many smaller and less established religions were unable to obtain the signatures necessary for second tier registration. 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 religious groups 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 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.

In November 2005 the lower house of Parliament passed an amended Church Law that came into effect the following month. The new law governs the establishment and regulation of church-sponsored charities, schools, and other institutions. A group of 25 mainly Christian Democratic Parliamentarians submitted a complaint against the new law before the Constitutional Court in January 2006. The complaint includes charges that the new law contradicts Article 16, Paragraph 2 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms that stipulates that ". . . churches and religious associations . . . found [establish or create] religious orders and other church institutions, independent of state authorities." The Parliamentarians' complaint focuses upon the constitutionality of the law's wording and the level of state regulation over church-sponsored institutions. The case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious organizations receive approximately $54 million (1.1 billion Czech crowns) annually from the Government. Funds are divided proportionally among the 17 of the 26 religious organizations that have elected to receive state assistance based on the number of clergy in each. (The eight religious organizations that do not accept state funding are the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the New Apostolic Church, Open Brethren, Hindus, Hare Krishnas, Community of Christians, and Christian Congregants. Some of these religions refuse state funding on theological grounds.) Of this sum, approximately $32 million (818 million Czech crowns) is used to pay salaries to clergymen. The rest of the funding goes to church administration and maintenance of church property.

In 2004, Parliament approved a law designating January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day in the country. A 2000 law outlaws Holocaust denial and provides for prison sentences of 6 months to 3 years for public denial, questioning, approval of, or attempts to justify the Nazi genocide. The law also outlaws the incitement of hatred based on religion.

Missionaries must obtain a long-term residence and work permit if they intend to remain longer than 90 days. There were reports of delays of over 6 months in processing visas for missionaries during 2006. There is no special visa category for religious workers; foreign missionaries and clergy are required to meet the stringent conditions for a standard work permit even if their activity is strictly ecclesiastical or voluntary in nature.

Of the 26 registered churches in the country, 10 have obtained permission from the Ministry of Culture (under the 2002 Law on Religious Freedom and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations) to teach religion in state schools. According to the Education Ministry, although religious instruction is optional in public schools, school directors must introduce religious education choices if there are at

least seven students in one class of the same religious group who require and request classes.

In April 2006, schools throughout a significant portion of the country were instructed to inform students at all levels that a number of state-recognized religions are harmful and dangerous to youth, and are similar to Satanism, drug abuse and the sexual exploitation of children. Some of the churches included as harmful to youth were Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Scientology, among others.

The Government continued its effort to resolve religious communal property restitution problems, especially with regard to Jewish property. Jewish claims dated to the period of the Nazi occupation during World War II, while Catholic authorities pressed claims for properties that were seized under the former Communist regime. While many Jewish property claims have been resolved over the years, there was little progress made on resolving the Catholic Church's claims during the reporting period.

In 1994 Parliament amended the 1991 Law on Restitution, which originally applied only to property seized after the Communists took power in 1948, to provide for restitution of, or compensation for, property wrongfully seized between 1938 and 1945 by the Nazi regime. This amendment provided for the inclusion of Jewish private properties, primarily buildings. Both the amendment and the original law required the claimants to be Czech citizens. This citizenship restriction unfairly impacted Czechs who obtained citizenship in the United States, as these naturalized citizens were required to forfeit their Czech citizenship under the terms of a 1928 treaty between the two countries. The treaty was finally abrogated in August 1997, by which time the 1992 and 1995 deadlines for filing claims had already passed.

By decree, the Government returned most of the state-owned properties claimed by the Federation of Jewish Communities, as did the city of Prague. However, despite a Government appeal, other cities were not as responsive. Two significant cases in Brno remain unresolved. Legal proceedings were under way between the Brno Jewish Community and the state at the end of the reporting period. In 1994 the Federation of Jewish Communities identified 202 communal properties as its highest priorities for restitution, although it had more than 1,000 potential property claims. Of these 202 cases, 80 had been resolved and, with the exception of the 2 complex cases in Brno, the Jewish community tacitly agreed to forego claims on the remaining 800 or so cases.

In 2001 the Federation of Jewish Communities established a Foundation for Holocaust Victims into which the Government invested approximately $15 million (in 2007 dollars) from the Government's National Property Fund to pay for those properties that cannot physically be returned. Funds were earmarked to help meet the social needs of Holocaust survivors, to support the restoration of synagogues and cemeteries, and to carry out educational outreach programs. The Foundation was expected to provide partial compensation in cases where the Government needs to retain the property or is no longer in possession of it.

Approximately one-third of the funds were dedicated to individual property claims. By March 2005 the Foundation announced payments totaling more than $5 million to approximately 500 individual claimants residing in 27 foreign countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs assisted the Foundation in its efforts to locate and contact survivors abroad. Having expended these efforts, and depleted the allocated funds, the authorities closed this part of the program during the period covered by this report. The remainder of the funds was being used for the preservation of communal property, educational programs, and community welfare. From these assets, the state supported numerous social welfare projects. In 2006 for example, the state contributed $300,000 to institutions providing healthcare for approximately 503 Holocaust survivors. (Note: Since applications were first accepted in 2001, the number of survivors has dropped from approximately 2500 to just over 500.)

When the previous Social Democratic Government came to power in 1998, it halted further restitution of non-Jewish religious communal property. As a result, there were 130,000 unresolved outstanding claims by the Catholic Church, 90 percent of which related to land. The Catholic Church continued to claim large tracts of "income-generating properties." Some of these properties were farmland and woodland that had been confiscated by the state and turned over to municipal governments or private owners. Other lands were forests that were administered by the state. Disputed land cannot be developed, and as a result many municipalities supported the resolution of the existing impasse. Efforts to resolve the final claims continued, but there was no measurable progress in resolving the Catholic Church's claims during the period covered by this report.

Public parliamentary hearings were held on church restitution in April 2007. In May 2007 the Minister of Culture announced that his Ministry intended to prepare

a proposal for parliamentary approval that would return land to individual religious orders and would resolve other remaining claims through financial compensation, but the Ministry had not presented a proposal by the end of the reporting period.

In February 2007 the Czech Supreme Court overturned the Prague City High Court's ruling from September 2006 that Prague Castle's St. Vitus Cathedral belonged to the Roman Catholic Church and not the state. The Church and the Government have fought over ownership rights of the cathedral since 1993. The Catholic Church maintained that the nationalization of the cathedral in 1954 under the Communist government was illegal and should be nullified.

In 2000 the Czech Government enacted a law enabling 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 heirs. Of the artwork belonging to the religious community, all but two have been returned. Of the 7000 works of art belonging to individuals, fewer than 1000 have been returned. The primary obstacle to resolving these claims is practical (tracing ownership or cases where no heir survives), not due to lack of cooperation on the part of Czech authorities.

Another provision of the law authorized the return of certain agricultural property in the Government's possession to its original owners. In 2006 the Government extended the law indefinitely, allowing individuals at any time to file claims for art in the state's possession.

In October 2006 construction of a new shopping center near the city of Plzen uncovered the remains of a previously unknown 15th century Jewish cemetery. The Chief Rabbi of the Czech Republic, acting on behalf of the local Jewish Community, visited the site a number of times and consulted with the European Council of Rabbis. An agreement was reached in November 2006 under which the company constructing the mall offered to elevate the building 1.5 meters above the cemetery, gave assurances regarding the building process, and allowed representatives of the local community to observe the construction.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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 interfaith activities during the period covered by this report, including partial funding of the Christian and Jewish Society.

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 Church management and financing of many of its social projects. The 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 speed of granting registrations. For example, in 2006 the Ministry registered a Catholic religious enterprise in northern Moravia, which the Constitutional Court ruled in 2003 had been improperly denied registration.

In 2006 the Armenian Apostolic Church withdrew its application for registration with the Ministry of Culture, seemingly due to the Church's realization that it did not meet the necessary standards.

In 2006 the Ministry of Culture denied the application by the Union of Muslim Communities to receive an exemption from the registration law—an exemption that would have permitted them accelerated second-tier registration status. Such status would allow the community to perform specific functions, such as providing Islamic religious instruction in state schools, establishing private religious schools, performing marriage ceremonies, and designating persons to perform clerical activities in the military, and within prisons and detention facilities. The Ministry denied the application, determining that the Union did not meet the legal requirements. The Ministries of Interior, Justice, Education, and Defense also opposed the exemption. However, the Union of Muslim Communities continued to be free to visit individuals in prisons and detention facilities without this designation.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism persisted among some elements of the population, including neo-Nazi groups and Islamic extremists. In general, public expressions of anti-Semitic sentiment were rare, and Holocaust denial investigations and prosecutions were vigorously pursued by authorities. A small but persistent and fairly well-organized extreme right-wing movement with anti-Semitic views existed in the country.

The activities of groups such as National Resistance ("Národní odpor") and National Corporativism ("Národní korporativismus") were characterized by racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim attitudes, disseminating Nazi propaganda, and holocaust denial.

Extremist expressions are rare in political discourse. However, a small fringe party (the National party) that does not have representation in Parliament made some extremist expressions.

During the reporting period, there were rallies in several cities throughout the country organized by neo-Nazi and skinhead organizations. In August 2006 the police halted a neo-Nazi march in front of the Israeli Embassy in Prague and arrested participants, many of whom illegally possessed weapons.

There were reports of several neo-Nazi concerts. 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. The police intervened in several incidents where hate speech was used. On occasion, neo-Nazi action was ignored by the police and other authorities. Sometimes police appeared to offer protection to neo-Nazis from Anarchist demonstrators.

Police shut down a neo-Nazi concert in Ceske Budejovice in December of 2006 when one of the bands, performing before a crowd of approximately 120 neo-Nazis, started playing racist music. The police arrested seven persons for inciting hatred of a group of persons or of limiting their rights and freedoms. However, another similar concert occurred with no arrests in the city of Tabor in November 2006, when 250 skinheads attended a concert and 1 participant gave the Nazi salute.

In August 2006 the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic received e-mails blaming the Jews and Israel for the war against Hezbollah. Similar threats of an anti-Semitic nature were reported in several city centers, such as Brno, and the head of the Jewish community in Prague received e-mails accusing Israelis of the "war against the Palestinians."

Narodni Odpor (National Resistance), threatened Jewish groups and petitioned the President in August 2006 for permission to fight with the Iranian military against Israel. The group stated that if the Czech president refused their demand to enlist in the Iranian army, they would perpetrate violence against Jews and synagogues in the country.

In October 2006 the leading newspaper *Mlada Fronta Dnes* reported that Islamic extremists had planned to take over a major Jewish target, reportedly the Prague synagogue, and capture hostages. The intended plan was to abduct Jewish residents of Prague, hold them hostage in the Jerusalem Synagogue, stage negotiations, and then blow up the synagogue with its occupants. The Government did not comment on these reports; however, it raised the national terrorist alert level for a short period of time and increased security near the most prominent Jewish institutions.

In March 2007 and previously in October 2006, vandals stole a total of three bronze plaques from a former Nazi concentration camp outside Prague honoring the victims of fascism. In March 2007 vandals also destroyed or damaged several tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Hranice na Prerovska. In late 2006 vandals destroyed several tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Hroznetin. In April 2006 obscenities directed towards Jews were spray-painted on a villa that belonged to a well-known Jewish family before the Second World War. Police investigation of these crimes resulted in no arrests. In each incident, police responded with appropriate investigations.

Police closed an investigation of cases of vandalism in 2005 of a synagogue and three Jewish memorials after being unable to identify any perpetrators. Local Jewish organizations believed police conducted thorough investigations.

The Government made positive attempts to counter anti-Semitism. In May 2007 President Vaclav Klaus honored the victims of the Holocaust by attending a memorial service held to commemorate the end of WWII at the Nazi Concentration Camp in Terezin. Prime Minister Topolanek attended the unveiling of a restored "hidden" synagogue inside the camp, and the Education Ministry also sponsored and hosted a number of seminars on Holocaust education at the camp.

Festivals of Jewish culture throughout the country in May 2007 were to continue until September to celebrate the 1,000-year history of the Jewish community in the country's lands. The Jewish Museum of Prague, with the support of the Ministry

of Culture, designated 2006 as the "Year of Jewish Culture" to mark the 100-year anniversary of the Jewish Museum. This nationwide commemoration involved partnerships with other state and private institutions and included film festivals, music festivals, educational and social events, theater productions and other cultural events across the country. The Jewish Museum and Prague's Jewish quarter remained the most visited museum in the country and one of the most popular tourist attractions.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2006 Parliament passed a measure to extend the deadline for filing art restitution claims by Holocaust victims indefinitely. Holocaust Remembrance Day was observed in January 2007 in public events in Prague and elsewhere throughout the country. The public and media response to these events was extremely positive.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice (see Anti-Semitism). Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The immigrant population was relatively small and included persons from Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Slovakia, and Vietnam. Immigrants did not report any difficulties in practicing their respective faiths

There were no reported violent anti-Semitic incidents against individuals in the country during the reporting period, and there were isolated reports of property damage or vandalism. A small but persistent and fairly well-organized extreme right movement with anti-Semitic views existed within the country. Some neo-Nazi rallies and concerts occurred throughout the year.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Government efforts on religious issues focused largely on encouraging the Government and religious groups to resolve religious property restitution claims and registration of religious organizations.

During the reporting period, 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 regarding property wrongfully taken from Holocaust victims, the Jewish community, and churches.

The Embassy maintained 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 matters. Several meetings were held with the Federation of Jewish Communities and the Chief Rabbi to assist in the protection of the newly discovered 15th-century Jewish cemetery in Plzen. 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 respected 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were occasional reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, reflecting tensions among increasing numbers of immigrants from Islamic countries, and young sympathizers of the far-right.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy promotes religious dialogue, particularly with the Muslim community. The Embassy sponsored Muslim

leaders and young people to participate in activities and programs that promote diversity, multiculturalism, integration, and tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities, as one foundation of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 16,639 square miles and a population of 5.4 million. As of January 2006, 83 percent of the population belonged to the official Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although only 3 percent of church members attend services regularly, most members utilize the church for weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, and religious holidays.

As a result of immigration trends, the second largest religious community is Muslim, constituting 3.7 percent of the population (210,000 persons), followed by communities of Catholics (35,000), Jehovah's Witnesses (15,000), Jews (7,000), Baptists (5,500), Pentecostals (5,000), and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4,500). There are also many communities with fewer than 3,000 members, including Seventh-day Adventists, the Catholic Apostolic Church, the Salvation Army, Methodists, Anglicans, and Russian Orthodox. The German minority in southern Jutland and other non-Danish communities (particularly Scandinavian groups) have their own religious groups. Those describing themselves as not religious or as atheists are 5.4 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively, of the population.

Missionaries operate within the country. The country is experiencing the "reverse missionary" phenomenon, as increasing numbers of missionaries from the developing world return to Europe to preach in non-denominational churches that attract the country's citizens as well as its recent immigrants. A June 11, 2007, press report indicated that "a quarter to a third of all people in church in Copenhagen any given Sunday morning are attending a foreign-run service," according to a Lutheran bishop.

The European headquarters of the Church of Scientology is located in Copenhagen, although it is not officially approved as a religion.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution stipulates that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the national church, the reigning monarch shall be a member of the Church, and the state shall support it. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the only religious organization that can receive state subsidies or funds directly through the tax system. Approximately 12 percent of the Church's revenue comes from state subsidies; most of the rest comes from the church tax that is paid only by members. No individual is compelled to pay church tax or provide direct financial support to the national church or any other religious organization. However, members of other faiths, notably Catholics, have argued that the system is unfair, and that the Government does not provide religious equality, despite providing religious freedom. Allowing other religious organizations to be given the same status and privileges as the Evangelical Lutheran Church would require changes to the Constitution.

Eleven Christian holy days are considered national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and Christmas Day 2 (December 26). National religious holidays do not have an evident negative effect on other religious groups.

Aside from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Government grants official status to other religious groups. Prior to 1970, a total of 11 religious communities were approved in the form of recognition by royal decree, including the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Russian Orthodox and Jewish communities. Since then, the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has approved more than 100 religious communities and churches under the Marriage Act, including several Islamic groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christian Orthodox, Hindu, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and the indigenous Norse belief system known as Forn Sidr. These officially approved religions receive a number of special rights, including the right to perform marriage ceremonies with legal effect, the right to residence permits for foreign preachers, the right to establish cemeteries, and certain tax exemptions. The difference between religious groups recognized by royal decree and those approved under the Marriage Act is that ministers of those recognized under the act may name and baptize children with legal effect, keep church registers, and transcribe certificates on the basis of such registers.

Religious communities not recognized by royal decree or approved under the Marriage Act 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.

The 1999 Guidelines for approval of religious organizations established the following requirements for religious groups: a written text of the religion's central traditions, descriptions of its most important rituals, an organizational structure accessible to public control and approval, and constitutionally elected representatives who may be held responsible by the authorities. Additionally, the organization must "not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order."

The Church of Scientology did not seek official approval as a religious organization during the period covered by this report. Its 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 Church of Scientology filed a fourth application, which was suspended at their request in 2000. In suspending their application, the Church of Scientology asked the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs to clarify the approval procedure; however, the ministry told them they must first submit an application before the ministry could provide any feedback. Despite Scientology's unofficial status, the Church of Scientology maintained its European headquarters in Copenhagen.

There are no restrictions on proselytizing or missionary work as long as practitioners obey the law and do not act inconsistently with public morality or order. All schools, including religious schools, receive Government financial support. While the Evangelical Lutheran faith is taught in the public schools, a student may withdraw from religious classes with parental consent. Section 76 of the Constitution protects the rights of parents to homeschool or educate their children in private schools.

During the period covered by the report, the Government expanded efforts to promote further social and economic integration of refugees and immigrants. These efforts emerged from widespread political and social debate on the integration of immigrants and refugees following the Muhammad cartoon crisis and included discussion of measures to address employment and education gaps between ethnic Danes and immigrants. On November 27, 2006, the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) presented its Annual Report to the European Parliament. Among other things, the report noted that independent Muslim schools that teach religion as well as a broader curriculum have been operating in the country for years.

The law requires that "Christian studies" be taught in public schools. The course covers world religions and philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, the course devotes the most time to Christianity. The course is compulsory, although students may be exempted from the course if a parent presents a request in writing. If the student is 15 or older, the student and parent must jointly request the student's exemption from the course. According to the Ministry of Education, less than 2 percent of students in the greater Copenhagen area, the area with the highest concentration of other religious populations, "opt out" of the Christian studies course.

On April 19, 2007, the Government passed legislation that will require all foreign religious proselytizers to pass a Danish language test before being allowed to enter the country, although it has not yet been determined when that requirement will be implemented. Critics claim that the measure violates the European Convention on Human Rights and is aimed at restricting the entry of Muslim clerics, whose number is already restricted under a 2004 "Imam Law" which requires that the number of religious residence visas be reasonably proportioned to the size of the corresponding religious community. Additionally, the visa applicant must prove association with a recognized or approved religious community and possess a relevant background or education as a religious preacher, missionary, or member of a religious community.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although Government policy contributed to the free practice of religion for most religious groups, the Government restricts the issuance of clerical visas (see Legal/Policy Framework section). These requirements have a disproportionate effect on groups that depend on missionaries from abroad, such as Muslims.

In mid-April 2007 several members of parliament from the Danish People's Party (DF) made public statements disparaging Islam, with one equating the Muslim headscarf with the Nazi swastika as symbols of totalitarianism and a second referring to Islam as "a loser religion." The leader of the Danish People's Party subsequently denounced the anti-Muslim statements made by her party's members.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, perpetrated primarily by immigrants. Both the members of the Jewish community and police sources attested to occasional friction between the Jewish and Muslim communities. Press reports of ethnic Danes and non-Muslims committing anti-Semitic acts were uncommon during the reporting period. Most anti-Semitic acts involved vandalism, graffiti, or verbal assaults. Data were difficult to determine because such reports were generally entered via a police hotline, or came from the Jewish community, and were rarely followed by an arrest.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On September 22, 2006, the first Muslim cemetery in the country opened, in the Copenhagen suburb of Br ndby, following approval by the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs in April 2006. The opening marked the culmination of a 15-year effort by members of the Muslim community. Prior to the opening, Muslims were buried in separate Muslim sections of Danish cemeteries or were buried abroad.

During the period covered by this report, plans progressed for the construction of a grand mosque in Copenhagen, as well as in Aarhus, the country's second largest city.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, such as occasional reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, reflecting tensions among increasing numbers of immigrants from Islamic countries and young sympathizers of the far right. The country, nevertheless, has a long history of welcoming religious minorities and affording them equal treatment.

The November 27, 2006, EUMC report cited 22 racial/religious incidents of possible "Islamophobia" during the previous year and stated that a recent poll suggested that two out of three Danish citizens viewed Muslims living in Europe today with suspicion. Although a May 2006 International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights poll had suggested that the overall political climate for Danish Muslims had deteriorated, an opinion poll in early 2007 indicated that refugees and immigrants felt less discriminated against since the Muhammad cartoon crisis in early 2006, with the number of immigrants reporting some form of discrimination in 2006 dropping to 27 percent from 33 percent in 2005.

During the first week of October 2006, television videotape was broadcast repeatedly on a national TV station, TV2, which showed youths in the Danish People's Party drawing cartoons mocking Muhammad, including one depicting him as a camel with beer bottle humps. The tape was made in early August 2006. The Prime Minister denounced the drawings and said the activists' behavior, "in no way represents the way the Danish people . . . view Muslims or Islam."

Unemployment figures, crime rates (especially among young adults), and education dropout rates tended to be significantly higher among minority groups and were sometimes alleged to be indicative of discrimination on the basis of religion. However, it was difficult to separate religious differences from differences in language and ethnicity, and the latter may be equally important in explaining unequal outcomes in access to well-paying jobs and social advancement. The integration of immigrant groups from Islamic countries was an important political and social topic of discussion.

There were isolated incidents of anti-immigrant sentiment, including graffiti, low-level assaults, denial of service, and employment discrimination on racial grounds. The Government criticized the incidents, investigated several, and brought some cases to trial.

The international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to operate in the country despite periodic calls by several political parties to ban the group. In February 2007 the High Court sentenced Fadi Abdullatif, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir spokesman in the country, to 2 months in prison for inciting violence against Jews by calling on Muslims to "kill them all, wherever you find them."

As in the first half of 2006, reports continued of desecration of cemeteries, many of them Muslim graves. On July 24, 2006, the press reported that sites within the Muslim cemetery near Copenhagen and the Islamic community center in Copenhagen were defaced with painted swastikas.

SECTION IV. U.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 regularly engages in dialogue with religious leaders and groups from the country's diverse religious community. Embassy officers engaged in an active Muslim outreach program, which included numerous meetings with religious and community leaders of leading Muslim organizations in the country. Embassy officers had wide-ranging discussions with the Muslim leaders on topics including religious and cultural diversity, democracy and civil liberties, the importance of interfaith dialogue and its role in supporting religious freedom, and Muslim life in the United States. The U.S. Department of State sponsored Muslim leaders identified by the Embassy to participate in established International Visitors programs focusing on diversity and multiculturalism. The Embassy continued sports and summer internship programs targeting young people in religious and ethnic minority communities, and the Embassy also worked with Danish nongovernmental organizations to support arts and educational exchange programs for minority youths in programs aimed at promoting integration and tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities.

ESTONIA

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

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S 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 17,666 square miles and a population of 1.35 million (including 68 percent ethnic Estonian, 26 percent Russian, 2 percent Ukrainian, 1 percent Belarusian, and 1 percent Finnish). The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) is the largest denomination, with 165 congregations and approximately 180,000 members. The Estonian Orthodox Church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP), has 30 congregations with an estimated 170,000 members, and the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC) has 59 congregations with approximately 25,000 members. There are smaller communities of Baptists, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Old Believers, Methodists, and other religious groups. There is a small Jewish community of approximately 2,500 members, with a synagogue, community center, and day school in operation. A new synagogue opened in May 2007, the only building in the country specifically designated for use as a synagogue. There are also communities of Muslims, Buddhists, and many other religious groups; each has fewer than 6,000 adherents.

The ethnic Estonian majority is mainly Lutheran, while most religious adherents among the country's Russian-speaking population are Orthodox.

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 renovation. The renovation of two churches—St. John's Lutheran Church in Tartu and St. Simeon's and St. Anne's Orthodox Church in Tallinn—was completed during 2004–06. In May 2007 St. Simeon's and St. Anne's Orthodox Church in Tallinn was consecrated. The city of Tallinn and other municipalities have their own ongoing projects for renovation of churches. The Government's continuing renovation and development program of churches included churches such as St. John's Lutheran Church in Tallinn, St. John's Lutheran Church in Tartu, St. Mary Magdalene's Church in Rapla, and Alexander's Church in Narva. Church attendance, which saw a surge coinciding with the independence movement in the early 1990s, has since decreased significantly.

In recent years many groups have sent foreign missionaries into the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution states that there is no state church.

There are other laws and regulations that directly or indirectly regulate individual and collective freedom of religion. The Churches and Congregations Act and the Non-Profit Associations and Unions Act regulate the activities of religious associations. The statutes of churches, congregations, and unions of congregations are registered at the city courts.

The Churches and Congregations Act decrees that the commanding officer of each military unit shall guarantee soldiers the opportunity to practice their religion. Military chaplain services extend to service members of all faiths. The Churches and Congregations Act also decrees that prison directors shall ensure inmates the opportunity to practice their religious beliefs. Soldiers and prisoners exercised this right in practice.

A church, congregation, or association of congregations must have a management board. Citizens and legal residents may be members of a management board. In order to formally register with the city court, the management board of a religious association submits an application signed by all members of the board. A congregation must have at least 12 adult members. The minutes of the constitutive meeting, a copy of statutes, and a notarized copy of signatures of the members of the management board serve as supporting documents for the registration application.

A program of basic ecumenical religious instruction is available in public schools. A school must offer religious studies at the primary or secondary level if at least 15 students request it. Comparative religious studies are 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, one Evangelical and one Catholic, in Tartu that had a religion-based curriculum.

The Government took steps to promote anti-bias and tolerance education. Since 2003 the Government has observed on January 27 the annual Holocaust and Other Crimes against Humanity Victims' Memorial Day. The country is a liaison member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.

In January 2007 *A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust*, compiled by the Estonian History Teachers' Association in cooperation with Living History Forum (Sweden) and co-financed by the Government, was made available to teachers. This teacher's guide provides resources to assist in designing a program for individual classrooms to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day and offers additional materials for Holocaust lessons in history classes. These teaching materials include a CD and a DVD.

The International Commission for Investigation of Crimes against Humanity on issues related to the German and Soviet occupations of the country continued its work.

The property restitution process, by which the Government transferred religious properties back to religious associations, was carried out under the Principles of the Ownership Reform Act, passed in 1991. The process has largely been completed. By the end of the reporting period, most Orthodox Church properties, including those in use by the EOCMP, were under the legal control of the EAOC. The Government transferred seven properties to the EOCMP during the previous reporting period and the three remaining properties during this reporting period.

According to local Jewish leaders, property restitution was not an issue for the community, since most prewar religious buildings were rented, not owned.

Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Christmas, and Pentecost are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Although the majority of citizens were nominally Lutheran, ecumenical services on national days, Christian holy days, or at public events were common. There is a deep-seated tradition of tolerance of other denominations and religious groups.

During the reporting period there were no confirmed acts of anti-Semitism.

In April 2007 two graveyards were vandalized. Vandals damaged 2 grave plaques in a Jogeva County cemetery and 13 crosses and grave plaques in a Laane County cemetery. The police started criminal proceedings; there was no additional information available by the end of the reporting period.

In April 2007 Tartu Rural Court sentenced a graveyard vandal to probation for 2 years for stealing metal figures from Raadi cemetery. Earlier thefts of church property prompted the Estonian Council of Churches and the Board of Antiquities to initiate a database of items under protection. The database, which comprises digital photos and detailed descriptions, is shared as needed with law enforcement agencies.

In June 2006 two vandals damaged seven grave plaques and several lanterns in Rakvere cemetery. Police took two suspects into custody, and they pled guilty. In September 2006 the court sentenced one of them to 5 months in prison.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officials of the U.S. Embassy met with the religious affairs department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, nongovernmental organizations, and a wide range of figures in religious circles. During the reporting period, Embassy officials continued to engage the Government and nongovernmental actors to promote dialogue and education on Holocaust issues in the country.

In November 2006 the U.S. Government provided partial funding to the Jewish cultural center to organize a Jewish cultural festival.

The U.S. Government funded a travel grant for two history and civics teachers to attend a teacher-training program at Keene College's Cohen Center for Holocaust Studies in July 2006.

FINLAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. According to law, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) and the Orthodox Church are the established state churches.

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

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 130,127 square miles and a population of 5,240,000. Approximately 83 percent of the population belongs to the ELC and 1 percent to the Orthodox Church. There are 7 Roman Catholic congregations with an estimated 8,000 registered members, and 2 Jewish congregations with approximately 1,500 members.

Pentecostal church communities registered as associations have an estimated 45,000 members. However, only a fraction of Pentecostal churches are registered, and the actual number of Pentecostal worshippers is higher.

There are approximately 20,000 Muslims, compared with 1,000 a decade ago. Their numbers continue to grow due to immigration and a high birthrate. Of these, approximately 15,000 are Sunni and 5,000 are Shiite. The largest group is Somali; there are also communities of North Africans, Bosnians, peninsula Arabs, Tartars, Turks, and Iraqis. There are four major Muslim organizations: the Muslim Community in Finland, the Tampere Muslim Community, Shi'a Muslims, and the Multicultural Dawa Center of Islam.

Membership in other nonstate religions totals approximately 60,000. An estimated 10 percent of the population does not belong to any religious group.

The rapid modernization of society has modified attitudes toward religion. Society has become more secular, political and social philosophy has diverged from religious philosophy, and religious belief has largely become a private matter. However, research indicates that most citizens still consider religion and spirituality very significant in their lives. Despite the small number of persons who attend church services regularly, citizens have a high regard for the church and its activities, consider their membership important, and still value church ceremonies. Most citizens are baptized and married in the church, confirmation classes are common, and most citizens choose religious burial services.

In the past several decades, as many as 400,000 have left the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). Reports estimated that 40,000 left the ELC during the reporting period, an increase of 7,000 over the preceding period and an all-time high. Separation from the church has risen markedly since implementation of the Religious Freedom Act of 2003, which made separation much easier. The rate of separation is much higher among younger citizens; in October 2006 a so-called "youth barometer" found that two-thirds of citizens aged 15 to 29 believed in God, but only 40 percent regarded themselves as religious.

In surveys, the most common reason offered for leaving the church was a perceived lack of personal significance of church membership, especially among younger respondents. Some very religious people also left the church, stating that the modern church's message did not meet their deeper spiritual needs. Others said religion was of such a personal nature that they did not need the church. Approximately 10 percent gave the church tax as their reason for leaving the ELC.

Catholics, Muslims, and Jews, as well as "nontraditional" religious groups, freely professed and propagated their beliefs. Such groups as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have been active for decades.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The law includes the right to profess and practice religion and to express personal belief. Everyone has the right to belong, or decline to belong, to a religious community. The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

There are two state churches: the ELC and the Orthodox Church. All citizens who belong to either pay a church tax set at 1 to 2 percent of income, varying by congregation, as part of their income tax. Those who do not want to pay the tax must separate from membership. These taxes help defray the cost of running the churches. The state churches record births, deaths, and marriages for members (state registrars do this for other persons).

The Religious Freedom Act of 2003 includes regulations on registered religious communities. To be recognized, a religious group must have at least 20 members, have as its purpose the public practice of religion, and its activities should be guided by a set of rules. The Government recognizes 55 religious groups.

The act allows people to belong to more than one denomination; however, most religious communities do not allow their members to do so.

The religious affiliation of a child does not automatically follow that of a parent. Membership in or resignation from a religious community is always based on a separate expression of the will of the parents/guardians, such as baptism. The denomination of any person older than 12 may be changed only by permission of that person.

Programs available through the Ministries of Education and Labor focus on discrimination, including religious discrimination.

Modest state subsidies were being planned for religious communities and were scheduled to be included in the 2007 state budget. Religious communities must request the funds separately from general tax revenues. The amount of the subsidy would be approximately $7 (€5) per person, although the smallest communities would not qualify for these subsidies.

All public schools provide religious and/or philosophical instruction; students may choose to study either subject. In certain Helsinki area schools, there are more Muslim students than members of the country's second largest religion, Orthodoxy. Countrywide, the number of Muslim students has increased by approximately 20 percent each year over the past 3 years. This trend is expected to continue for at least 2 to 3 years.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In 2006 the Ministry of Education denied permits to five of seven groups that wished to start or expand private Christian schools. The ministry stated that concern over academic standards was a significant factor in its denials. The Minister of Education also stated that it was not the proper function of schools to promote a single religious truth. The groups in question appealed the ministry's decision, but there was no response by the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

In March 2007 authorities ordered a man, charged in the district court of Vantaa with selling banned neo-Nazi propaganda by mail order, to be tried in absentia. The original arrest warrant dated from 2003, but the subject had evaded arrest for several years, and the statute of limitations was approaching its end. Shortly afterward the man reappeared and was arrested. At the end of the reporting period, the man was in custody awaiting trial.

In July 2006 the Porvoo district court found the deputy chief editor of the newspaper *Uusimaa*, an independent paper with a circulation of 13,400, guilty of inciting hatred against an ethnic or religious group. The editor had published a controversial article implying that the Holocaust was desirable. The court fined the editor and paper.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were few reports during the reporting period of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There were no reports of verbal or physical violence directed against persons or property of any minority religious group.

"Nontraditional" religious groups generally were not subject to discrimination, despite the intolerant attitudes of some members of society.

Immigrants did not encounter difficulties in practicing their religious beliefs; however, they sometimes encountered discrimination and xenophobia.

Some citizens were not receptive to proselytizing by adherents of "nontraditional" religious groups, in part because they regarded religion as a private matter.

In March 2007 approximately 90 clergy of the ELC signed a petition supporting two assistant vicars who refused to officiate at a religious service alongside female clergy. The two, from two different parishes, faced disciplinary proceedings for refusing to work with women clerics. Although female clergy have been ordained in the ELC for almost two decades, the issue remained controversial, and such cases periodically arose. Conservative clergy and parishioners remained less comfortable with the full ordination of female ministers.

However, the press strongly supported female clergy and gender equality. The country's largest newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, wrote that the matter was not an internal issue of the church, but a legal issue of discrimination and gender equality.

Archbishop Jukka Paarma, the head of the ELC, told the Finnish News Agency that he did not approve of the behavior of clergy refusing to officiate alongside their female colleagues.

In 2005 gay marriage was discussed at an ELC conference; however, after the event, the ELC failed to adopt a policy on registered same-sex couples and homosexuality. The conference set up a working group to present findings within a year, but it did not issue a report by the end of the reporting period.

In 2005 two clergy members wrote in a church weekly that they had given blessings in an unofficial capacity to registered gay and lesbian couples. They said it was a matter of conscience and encouraged same-sex couples to seek church blessings.

In May 2005 at a synod of the ELC in Turku, Archbishop Paarma said that single women and lesbian couples should not receive state-funded fertility treatment. He rejected the notion that childbearing was an inherent human right that should be supported by the state in all cases and stressed that the focus should always be on the child's rights when considering in vitro fertilization. In his opinion these rights included the right to have a mother and a father. He said that he did not condemn fertility treatment, calling it a blessing for many married couples.

SECTION IV. U.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 periodically met with representatives of religious communities (both mainstream and "nontraditional") to discuss religious freedom issues.

The Ambassador met with a delegation of American and local Orthodox Church leaders to discuss issues of shared concern, including religious tolerance and ecumenical exchanges.

In October 2006 an Embassy officer spoke to the Orthodox Seminary and other religious gatherings on the relationship between church and state in the United States and on the role of American faith-based institutions in charitable assistance. This activity supported an initiative by local Orthodox ecclesiastical leaders to promote tolerance and understanding.

FRANCE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, some religious groups remain concerned about legislation passed in 2001 and 2004, which provided for the dissolution of groups under certain circumstances and banned the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by public school employees and students. A 1905 law on the separation of religion and state prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. A law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools by employees and students entered into force in September 2004. Despite significant efforts by the Government to combat anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic attacks increased during 2006, with a marked increase in violent acts. The Government has a stated policy of monitoring potentially "dangerous" cult activity through the Inter-Ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES). Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions. Some groups also expressed concern with a Government report focusing on dangers that cults pose to minors.

Anti-Semitic acts increased by 6 percent in 2006, and violent incidents rose more sharply, from 99 in 2005 to 134 in 2006, according to the National Consultative Commission for Human Rights (NCCHR). There were 42 violent acts directed against the North African community in 2006, down from 64 in 2005. Of these incidents, 11 were explicitly anti-Islamic in nature, targeting mosques, cemeteries, or individuals. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to strongly criticize anti-Semitic and racist violence, and the Government provided 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. On May 13–16, 2007, the Special Envoy for Combating Anti-Semitism visited and met with Government officials and representatives from various religious communities as part of an ongoing effort to assess and to support international efforts against anti-Semitism.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 211,209 square miles and a population of 63.71 million.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. According to a January 2007 poll, 51 percent of respondents indicate they are Catholic, even if they never attend religious services. Another 31 percent of those polled state that they have no religious affiliation. Among Catholics, only 8 percent attend Mass weekly, one third do so "occasionally," and 46 percent attend "only for baptisms, weddings, and funerals." Only 52 percent of declared Catholics believe that the existence of God is "certain or possible." There are an estimated 5–6 million individuals of Muslim origin in the country (8 to 10 percent of the population), although estimates of how many of these are practicing vary widely. According to a 2004 survey, 36 percent of Muslims identify themselves as regularly observing traditional rites and practices. However, according to press reports of a September 2006 poll, 88 percent of Muslim respondents report that they were observing the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, a marked increase over previously recorded levels of observance. According to press reports, there are more than 2,000 mosques in the country. Protestants make up 3 percent

of the population, the Jewish and Buddhist faiths each represent 1 percent, and those of the Sikh faith less than 1 percent.

The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000. According to press reports, at least 60 percent of Jews are not highly observant, celebrating at most only the High Holy Days. The large majority of observant Jews are Orthodox. There are small Conservative and Reform congregations as well.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that 250,000 persons attend their services either regularly or periodically.

Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; the vast majority are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church.

Other religions present in the country include Evangelicals, Christian Scientists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Membership in evangelical churches is growing (with as many as 400,000 adherents, according to February 2007 press reports), including African-style "prosperity" churches especially in the suburbs of Paris, in large part because of increased participation by African and Antillean immigrants. According to the press, there are approximately 31,000 Mormons. The Church of Scientology has an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 members.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. A long history of conflict between religious groups and between the Church and the Republic led the state to break its ties to the Catholic Church early in the last century and adopt a strong commitment to maintaining a totally secular public sector. The 1905 law on the separation of religion and state, the foundation of existing legislation on religious freedom, prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith. Of the country's 10 national holidays, 5 are Christian holy days.

Religious organizations are not required to register but may apply for tax-exempt status or gain official recognition if they so wish. 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 normally not exempt from taxes). Associations in these two categories are subject to certain management and financial disclosure requirements. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. A cultural association may engage in profit-making activity. Although a cultural association is not exempt from taxes, it may receive Government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations, such as schools. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories; the Mormons, for example, run strictly religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school under their cultural association.

Under the 1905 statute, religious groups must apply to the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and to receive tax-exempt status. The prefecture reviews the submitted documentation regarding the association's purpose for existence. There is a process by which groups may appeal the initial decision of a prefecture. To qualify, the group's sole purpose must be the practice of some form of religious ritual. Printing publications, employing a board president, or running a school may disqualify a group from tax-exempt status.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 109 of 1,138 Protestant associations, 15 of 147 Jewish associations, and approximately 30 of 1,050 Muslim associations have tax-free status. Approximately 100 Catholic associations are tax-exempt; a representative of the Ministry of Interior reports that the number of non-tax-exempt Catholic associations is too numerous to estimate accurately. More than 50 associations of the Jehovah's Witnesses have tax-free status.

According to the 1905 law, associations of worship are not taxed on the donations that they receive. However, the prefecture may decide to review a group's status if the association receives a large donation or legacy that comes to the attention of the tax authorities. If the prefecture determines that the association is not in fact in conformity with the 1905 law, its status may be changed, and it may be required to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on present and past donations.

On October 17, 2006, the head of the Interior Ministry's Office for Religious Affairs, Didier Leschi, testified before Parliament about the use of tax advantages to combat "sectarian deviance," which he specified as violent and suicidal acts; inhumane treatment of children and adolescents, particularly victimization of young women by confinement; denial of schooling; forced marriage; and refusal to allow sexes to mix in schools or hospitals. He stated that the main legal measure by which

his office combats such deviance is through its power to regulate worship associations benefiting from tax advantages. This right to designate tax status applies to taxes on residence, land, and equipment, as well as exoneration from transfer taxes on gifts, legacies, bequeathals, and offerings; additionally, the discretion in designating tax status entails the right to issue receipts, allowing donors tax deductions. According to Leschi's testimony, this right to assign tax status "is useful as an instrument that may be used to control possible sectarian deviances of a group—and that at any moment; for if an organization no longer meets the necessary conditions, in particular with regard to public order, we may ask the prefect to repeal his authorization."

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. In 2002 the Council of Europe passed a resolution critical of the law and invited the Government to reconsider it to no avail. Although the provisions allowing for the dissolution of groups have never been applied, another aspect of the law was utilized for the first time in 2004 against the leader of a cult.

For historical reasons, the Jewish, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace and Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these religious groups. Adherents of these four religious groups may choose to have a portion of their income tax allocated to their religious organization in a system administered by the central Government.

Central or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before the 1905 law separating religion and state. In Alsace and Moselle, special laws allow the local governments to provide support for the building of religious edifices. The Government partially funded the establishment of the country's oldest Islamic house of worship, the Paris Grand 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 séjour* (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 2004, the Government passed legislation prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses; the legislation took effect at the beginning of the school year in 2004. Religious instruction is not given in public schools, but facts about religions are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may homeschool 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 affiliated with religious organizations.

In 2004 the Government released the Rufin Report, which concluded that racism and anti-Semitism were a threat to democracy and that anti-Semitic acts were not only carried out by elements of the extreme right and Muslim youth of North African descent, but also by "disaffected individuals" with anti-Semitic obsessions. The Rufin Report also warned against radical anti-Zionists who question Israel's right to exist. The report recommended that a law be created to punish those publicly equating Israel with apartheid or Nazi Germany. Additionally, the report concluded that the press law of 1881, designed to guarantee freedom of the press, was too unwieldy to adequately address the issues of racism and anti-Semitism. It recommended removing from the press law all injunctions against incitement to racism and anti-Semitism and putting them into a new law written specifically to address these issues. The Rufin Report also called for countering intolerance in primary schools; educating new immigrants about the fight against racism and anti-Semitism; and creating an observation system to monitor racist and anti-Semitic Web sites and to work closely with authorities to prosecute offenders.

On June 20, 2007, President Sarkozy's newly named Interior Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, received representatives of France's major religious confessions—Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish—to hear their perspectives on the public policy of public sphere secularism and to elicit their thoughts on the role of religion in community life, particularly with regard to young people. Part of the impetus for the meeting was the September 20, 2006, announcement, by then-Minister of the

Interior Sarkozy, of a plan to discuss the findings of a report from the Commission of Judicial Consideration on the Relation of Religions and Public Authority. Sarkozy stated that he wished to facilitate "a debate without taboos" about the merits of legal reform concerning religion.

The Commission, established in 2005 by Sarkozy and led by law professor Jean-Pierre Machelon, recommended reforming the 1905 law separating church and state to allow local communities to finance the construction of places of worship. The Machelon Report also proposed implementing a less rigid set of criteria necessary for a religion to have the legal status of an *association cultuelle*. The proposed reform would allow for *association cultuelle* to integrate activities such as social events and book selling, thereby "enlarging the social presence" of religions. The report proposals support Sarkozy's assertion in 2002 that the French state should encourage a public form of Islam, moderated by social recognition and open practice: "What we should be afraid of is Islam gone astray . . .'garage Islam' . . . 'basement Islam' . . . 'underground Islam.' It is not the Islam of the mosques, open to the light of day."

On January 8, 2007, an administrative court in Paris ruled that a nationalist group, Solidarity of the French, could no longer hand out "pig soup," made with bacon and pig parts, to the homeless. Many saw the group as inciting racial hatred by deliberately excluding those who follow a halal or kosher diet.

The Government has made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict antidefamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. Denial of crimes against humanity is illegal. The Gayssot Act (*Loi Gayssot*, 1990) makes it a crime to question the existence of the category of crimes against humanity as defined by the London Charter of 1945. 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 Conference of Bishops have publicly condemned racist and anti-Semitic violence. In 2003 a law was passed against crimes of a "racist, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic" nature, and in 2004 legislation further increased punishment for "hate" crimes. The Government regularly applies these laws in prosecuting anti-Semitic crimes.

The Government consults with the major religious communities through various formal mechanisms. The Catholic community is represented by the Council of Bishops. The Protestant Federation of France, established in 1905, comprises 16 churches and 60 associations, and serves as the interlocutor with the Government. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, includes Jewish *associations cultuelles* 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 Resistance formed the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF). The CRIF's mission is to fight anti-Semitism, preserve the memory of the Holocaust, affirm solidarity with Israel, and promote peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The National Council of the Muslim Faith 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, providing chaplains for prisons and the military, and certification of halal butchers. In 2004 then-Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of the Foundation for Islam to assist in the funding of mosques, provide a transparent vehicle for individual and foreign donations, and assist in the training of foreign imams in the country's language, history, and civics; however, it suffers from a lack of foreign or private funding. Funding mosques has also proven to be politically divisive. On April 17, 2007, a Marseille administrative council, at the behest of group of legislators, annulled a June 26, 2006, municipal council decision to facilitate building the Grande Mosque of Marseille. Tribunal members judged that the rescinded authorization, which would have provided a large tract of land for a nominal fee on a 99-year lease, constituted a state subsidy that contravened the 1905 law separating church and state. A new, fair market rate price is scheduled to be negotiated later in 2007.

In 2004 Parliament passed a law permitting the expulsion of individuals for "inciting discrimination, hatred or violence against a specific person or group of persons." On September 7, 2006, authorities deported to Algiers Chelali Benchellali, a controversial imam who made public statements in support of terrorism at his mosque in the suburbs of Lyon. According to the Interior Ministry, 17 Islamic activists were expelled in 2006, including at least 4 imams for promoting "propaganda in favor of radical Islam and inciting hate or violence." French law permits the revocation of acquired citizenship and expulsion of individuals determined to have in-

cited hate or violence. Although authorities based their actions on security grounds in some cases, some Muslims described the deportation of a number of radical Islamist religious figures since 2004 as a restriction on religious freedom.

The 2006 NCCHR announced that, as of January 2007, the Ministry of Justice would replace the statistical category of "Anti-Religious Acts" with the more precise categories of "Anti-Semitic Acts," "Anti-Islamic Acts" and "Other, including Anti-Christian Acts."

The MIVILUDES is charged with observing and analyzing "sect/cult" movements that constitute a threat to public order or that violate law, coordinating the appropriate responses to abuses by "cults," informing the public about potential risks, and helping victims to receive aid. Some groups expressed concern that MIVILUDES publications contributed to public mistrust of minority religions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, visited the country in 2005 and issued a report on her findings on March 8, 2006. While the Special Rapporteur indicated that the Government generally respected the right to freedom of religion or belief, she noted several areas of concern; particularly the 2004 law banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools, which may "protect the autonomy of minors who may be pressured or forced to wear a headscarf or other religious symbols" but also may serve to deny the rights of "minors who have freely chosen to wear a religious symbol to school as a part of their religious belief." She continued: "the stigmatization of the headscarf has provoked acts of religious intolerance when women wear it outside school."

In 2004 the European Commission on Human Rights ruled that the law banning religious symbols in school did not violate the freedom of religion. Some Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments voiced concerns about the law's potential to restrict religious freedom. Minority religious groups cite a growing body of precedent-setting case law from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which enforces the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and is binding on all Council of Europe members, to contest unequal treatment under law. Critics of the Government's distinction between religions and "cults" (*sectes*) note that, in support of a policy of "true religious pluralism," the ECHR has instructed governments to remain neutral and impartial, finding that the "the right to freedom of religion as guaranteed under the Constitution excludes any discretion on the part of the state to determine whether religious beliefs or the means used to express such beliefs are legitimate."

Following the enactment of the law, media reports indicated that a number of Muslim girls and Sikh boys had been expelled from public school for violations; all had subsequently reportedly enrolled in private schools, distance education courses, or schools abroad. One Muslim group indicated that the law adversely affected many more Muslim girls than boys, whether by causing them to seek alternative educational options or requiring them to remove their veil. Media reports estimated that, of the country's 13 million schoolchildren, approximately 1,200 Muslim school-aged girls wore headscarves. The Sikh community reported that, of the roughly 200 school-aged Sikh boys, 168 (some 84 percent) were affected by the legislation.

During the year authorities registered four legal cases involving infractions of the 2004 law. When school resumed in September 2006 after the summer vacation, schools in Seine-Saint-Denis denied admission to three Sikh students who refused to remove their turbans; two were subsequently accepted into private schools, and the third was awaiting an appearance before a disciplinary council at year's end. On November 21, 2006, a 16-year-old Sikh appealed his expulsion for refusal to take off his turban. The Association of United Sikhs supported his appeal. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of Muslim girls being denied admission at the beginning of the autumn term.

According to a March 28, 2007, statement by the director of United Sikhs Legal Team for the Right to Turban Campaign, in 2006 the United Sikhs filed a complaint with the European Court of Justice on behalf of all Sikhs whose turban cases were outstanding. In addition, at the end of the reporting period there were two cases awaiting appeal in the courts, one involving the petition of a group of Sikh schoolboys to wear their turbans in school, the other involving the demand of two Sikhs to wear their turbans for their official identification document photographs.

A respected Muslim observer complained that police sometimes singled out young Muslim men and demanded their documents, a tactic he described as a form of harassment intended to keep them out of certain neighborhoods.

On November 8, 2006, two of the 72 Muslim airport workers at the Paris airport Charles de Gaulle, whom the Government had stripped of their security clearances, won back their badges after taking legal action. The others, including six colleagues

who had also been part of the legal action lodged against Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, remain barred from restricted areas at the airport. Although unions at the state-owned facility met on November 7, 2006, to consider a strike to protest the Government's actions, which they claimed discriminated against Muslim employees, the officials were unable to reach agreement. There were also press reports that six workers were fired from Roissy Airport. Press reports indicated that lawyers for several of the men stated that investigators asked their clients how frequently they prayed during the day, if they had been to Mecca, and if they knew any imams. Authorities countered that thousands of Muslim workers had received credentials authorizing them to work in the secure area of the airport. Court cases are ongoing. In addition, according to July 24, 2006, press reports, the Minister of the Interior announced the closure of five unofficial Muslim "prayer rooms" at Charles de Gaulle airport.

The Government continued to encourage public caution toward some minority religions that it considers "cults" but is actively debating the basis on which religions are accorded the status of *association cultuelle*. On October 17, 2006, a heated parliamentary debate took place between Office of Religious Affairs Director Leschi and several deputies concerning the question and the status of the Jehovah's Witnesses. According to Mr. Leschi, "the administrative judge is very clear, the Jehovah's Witnesses have the right to profit from the [tax] advantages pertaining to worship associations." Leschi's statement elicited lively opposition, notably from deputy George Fenech who cited reports of child abuse among members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2005 then-Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin issued a circular indicating the authorities should focus their investigative efforts and attention on "small, fluid" groups that are "less easily identifiable," that use the Internet for recruitment, as opposed to the Parliament identifying sects. Some religious groups hailed the move as a step forward but asked the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to issue a circular rescinding repressive measures against minority religions. To date, the MOJ has issued no such circular.

In 1996 a parliamentary commission studying "cults" publicly released a report that identified 173 groups as "cults," including the Raelians, the Association of the Triumphant Vajra, the Order of the Solar Temple, Sukyo Mahikari, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Theological Institute of Nimes (an evangelical Christian Bible college), and the Church of Scientology. The Government has not banned any of the groups on the list; however, members of some of the groups listed have alleged instances of intolerance because of the ensuing publicity.

On May 5, 2007, a German court ruled that European countries should drop their Schengen entry prohibitions against Unification Church leaders the Reverend and Mrs. Moon, who are listed as "dangerous persons" under the European Schengen Information System and consequently are forbidden entry into the 12 Schengen Convention states. Reverend and Mrs. Moon have also brought a court action in France to overturn their designation, arguing that a reading of the Schengen Convention reveals that its security provisions are designed to keep out drug dealers, arms smugglers, terrorists, and other dangerous criminals, not leaders of religious groups—even controversial religious groups. Moreover, Moon's advocates have argued that all members of the Schengen System are also obligated by their membership in the United Nations and as signatories to the U.N.'s Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

On December 19, 2006, the Commission of Enquiry Regarding the Influence of Sects on Minors, presented its report entitled "Stolen Childhood—Minors Victimized by Cults." The National Assembly created the commission on June 28, 2006, to investigate the "insidious means" by which sects seek to proselytize youths and the negative impact sects can have on youths' physical and psychological well-being. The report found that children were increasingly easy targets for manipulation and exploitation by sectarian groups and that public sector action was key to preventing abuse. The Commission did not produce a list of suspect groups but defined the characteristics causing concern, including the practice of psychological destabilization, excessive financial demands on members, and the indoctrination of children. The report cited a senior official's assertion that "a minimum of 60,000 to 80,000 children" are being raised in a sectarian context, of which "about 45,000 are affiliated with the Jehovah's Witnesses," and that public authorities, notably the Ministry of Interior, had been "negligent" in their supervision of the danger.

The report concluded with 50 recommendations aimed at establishing better protection for children involved with sectarian religious groups. Recommended actions included enhancing oversight of homeschooling, mandating regular health check-ups for minors, providing access to legal counsel if needed, instituting safeguards against excessive confinement, creating a post dedicated to monitoring problems related to sectarian abuses, and strengthening MIVILUDES activities at an inter-

national level. Specifically, the report recommended working through the Council of Europe to create a European observatory of religious groups dedicated to facilitating intellectual exchanges among member countries to share experience and insight on how these groups are treated by member state governments.

Certain sectarian groups protested the report, including the Church of Scientology, which rejects its characterization as a cult, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, which asserted that on the day that the Third Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Sects was created, only 10 out of 577 members of parliament were present at the National Assembly. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses also alleged that during the reporting period the rapporteur and the secretary of the newly convened commission openly attacked them, describing them as delinquents and criminals and labeling their activities as "mafia-like." The commission's report also elicited criticism from other minority religious and civil rights groups, which labeled the commission's conclusions an affront to freedom of conscience and religious belief.

On January 24, 2007, MIVILUDES published its report for 2006, focusing on new fund-raising and recruitment strategies employed by groups it considers "cults." The report elaborated on the phenomenon of targeting for recruitment marginalized youth from inner-city and poor suburbs, again mentioning specifically the Church of Scientology's efforts to attract adherents from these environments. The 2006 report elaborated on proselytizing tactics and their psychological consequences, the increasing use of hallucinogenic drugs by members of certain cults, the effects of cult membership on extended families, and cults' efforts to develop private sector commercial interests, including legal, media, and governmental lobbying efforts. The MIVILUDES report concluded that certain judicial authorities remained reticent to recognize the "mental subjugation" suffered by many members of cults and recommended more elaborate means of information exchange among authorities, particularly in cases involving children's well-being.

Minority religious groups indicated that the allegations in the report were unsubstantiated and often false, adding to public mistrust of the organizations involved.

According to an April 19, 2007, press report, a Paris appeals court recently reversed a September 2006 judgment throwing out a 2002 complaint filed by a Belgian citizen against the Church of Scientology for fraud, extortion, and illegal use of drugs. Court lawyers argued that the 2006 judgment failed to investigate all the implicated parties and ignored psychiatric testimony according to which the plaintiff had been under "the permanent influence [of and] pressure from harassment" from Scientologists who were accused of having used "violent means" to intimidate and extort money.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination, frivolous lawsuits, and prosecution for allegedly fraudulent activity. On April 16, 2007, an administrative court in Nantes ruled in favor of SEL, a Church of Scientology organization, and against the mayor of Angers who had banned SEL from locally selling Dianetics and other books by L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology. The court rejected the mayor's claim that the sales prohibition was necessary to maintain public order and ordered the city of Angers to pay SEL $1,600 (€1,200) in damages.

Some observers voiced concerns about the tax authorities' scrutiny of the financial records of some religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, whose 2002 court ruling to pay back taxes, now currently totaling $54,400,000 (€40,908,000), is on appeal before the ECHR, which is expected to render a judgment in the summer of 2007. On December 21, 2006, *La Croix* reported that there was a good chance that the Government would lose its court case against the Jehovah's Witnesses and would be obligated to return $6,750,000 (€5,000,000) in property it had already confiscated from the group. Perhaps prompting this belief that the Government would lose the case, an article published on November 1, 2006, in *Le Canard Enchainé* reported that the Government had contacted the ECHR to relate its interest in negotiating an extra-judicial settlement with the Jehovah's Witnesses.

On October 12, 2006, the Government responded to the ECHR's May 4, 2006, notification of the Jehovah's Witnesses' 2005 application to the court. The Government provided its written observations on the admissibility and merits of the claims of the Jehovah's Witnesses based on the religious freedom and discrimination conventions of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Jehovah's Witnesses members claimed that they were discriminatorily and punitively audited because of their classification as a cult and their placement on a 1996 parliamentary list, and that authorities adopted a new administrative regulation to retroactively tax "manual donations" offered by adherents. The association further alleged that this tax had not been applied to any other nonprofit or religious organization, and the amount of the tax exceeds the assets of the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. The

Association of Jehovah's Witnesses has refused to pay what it considers an unjust tax.

Jehovah's Witnesses in the Vosges Department reported difficulty gaining permission to build a house of worship in the town of Deyvilliers, where an opposition group has lobbied since 2004 against the construction of a 1,500-seat Kingdom Hall by the Jehovah's Witnesses. On May 10, 2007, the *Agence France-Presse* reported that a local court ruled the Jehovah's Witnesses' complaint against the opposition group inadmissible.

On March 30, 2007, a Lyon appeals court upheld the March 15, 2007, Lyon court decision that the city, after refusing to rent communal meeting space to the Jehovah's Witnesses for a yearly gathering of 4,500 adherents, was compelled to rent the group a conference forum.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The NCCHR, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, reported in March 2007 that 2006 witnessed a slight increase in anti-Semitic acts—541 events, a 6 percent increase from the 508 reported events in 2005. A larger proportion of 2006 anti-Semitic acts were violent—134 as opposed to 99 in 2005. Recorded incidents returned to lower levels during the final months of 2006, a trend that continued into early 2007. Despite this overall increase in anti-Semitic acts in 2006, the NCCHR also reported that anti-Semitic acts committed by students during the 2005–2006 academic year dropped by 40 percent.

CRIF operated a hotline to register allegations of threats in the greater Paris region. Additionally, CRIF contributed an analysis of anti-Semitic acts and threats to the NCCHR's 2006 annual report. In a parallel study, the Service for the Protection of the Jewish Community announced on February 26, 2007, that 2006 witnessed larger increases in reported anti-Semitic activity, with 213 anti-Semitic acts (up 40 percent from 134 in 2005) and 158 anti-Semitic threats or insults (up 7 percent from 148 in 2005) for a total of 371 episodes (up 24 percent from 2005). These statistics indicate a net increase in anti-Semitic episodes for the months following the killing of Ilan Halimi on February 13, 2006, and the Israel-Hezbollah fighting during the summer. CRIF said in a subsequent communiqué that "the essential and most worrying aspect [of the report is a] 45 percent increase in physical attacks" on people. CRIF stated in an earlier 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 CRIF. CRIF also noted its concern about the availability of anti-Semitic diffusions via the Internet, radio, and satellite television.

The NCCHR report noted that the number of anti-Semitic threats and insults committed by those of "Arab-Muslim" background increased from 99 in 2005 to 115 in 2006, an increase of 16 percent. The number of threats and insults committed by the extreme right dropped (98 in 2006 as opposed to 150 in 2005) and made up 24 percent of the incidents recorded. Authorities were unable to identify the perpetrators of anti-Semitic violence in 61 percent of the cases. Individuals of "Arab-Muslim" background were responsible for 28 percent of violent incidents, while members of the extreme right were culpable for 10 percent.

The NCCHR report stated that "despite a significant response on the part of Government authorities," there is still much work that remains, particularly in creating a comprehensive strategy that includes judicial, educational, and public relations elements to fight racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. The NCCHR report went on to emphasize the importance of Government cooperation with civil society and the role of preventative action led by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing. The commission also noted certain Government omissions during 2006, specifically a failure to reconvene the Interministerial Committee for the Battle against Racism and Anti-Semitism since January 2005 and the absence of a national action plan in conformity with the final declaration of the World Conference of the United Nations against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Intolerance.

Despite the increase in recorded anti-Semitic acts in 2006, the NCCHR cites MOJ statistics that during 2006 there were 128 court cases involving religious discrimination (up 4 percent from 123 in 2005) and 458 court cases involving anti-Semitism (down 3 percent from 473 in 2005). (The MOJ makes a distinction between anti-Semitic acts and religious discrimination, which includes all other crimes with reli-

gious motivations, thus accounting for differences in statistics on overall religious discrimination.) Fifty-nine percent of the religious discrimination cases and 38 percent of the anti-Semitism cases led to judicial proceedings.

Prosecutors were under orders to seek maximum punishments in hate crimes and to systematically appeal sentences not considered strong enough.

On April 30, 2007, state prosecutors opened an official investigation for armed robbery and violence by a group with racist motives after an April 26, 2007, attack on a 22-year-old Jewish student in a Marseille metro parking area. According to the victim, two men physically assaulted her, including slashing her t-shirt with a knife and inscribing a swastika on her torso with a felt-tipped pen before fleeing with her purse and cell phone.

On April 21, 2007, vandals damaged 180 graves, a quarter of which were Jewish, in the main Le Havre cemetery of Saint-Marie.

On April 19, 2007, Lille Rabbi Elie Dahan, who presided over a well-attended commemoration ceremony following the desecration of 51 Jewish tombs in Lille, and who had been an active spokesman for the Jewish community during the subsequent police investigation, was verbally and physically assaulted in Paris. On March 31, 2007, desecration of the tombs prompted widespread condemnation and a large-scale police investigation into what one Government official called "the largest event of this sort ever to happen in the region." The vandalism elicited a solidarity march in the cemetery attended by 1,000 people.

In late March 2007, a Nice—area daily published an article detailing the continued existence of Vichy-era legal prohibitions on renting or selling property to Jews. According to the former Nice-Côte d'Azur CRIF president, it was regrettable that the discriminatory co-ownership settlements were still found in older contractual agreements because of the painful memories that they evoked; however, she explained that the measures themselves became null and void immediately after World War II and have not been applied to discriminate against Jewish property owners since that time.

On March 27, 2007, a Bordeaux Appeals Court overturned the June 2006 Toulouse administrative tribunal conviction of the state and the state railways, the SNCF, for their role in the deportation of Jews during World War II. The specific case was brought by the family of Georges Liepitz, whom the state railway transferred from Pau to the transit camp of Drancy, north of Paris. (The family was ultimately liberated.) The SNCF, which was ordered to pay $82,700 (€62,000) to the Lipietz family, successfully appealed the decision in which presiding judges emphasized that the SNCF was compelled to render its transportation services. According to the court, the SNCF acted as "a private entity" requisitioned by the German-controlled Vichy government, and the case therefore did not fall within the jurisdiction of an administrative court empowered to adjudicate disputes between citizens and the government. Lipietz announced his intention to appeal the judgment before the State Council, the highest administrative court, on the grounds that the SNCF is a public entity that the administrative courts should be qualified to judge. In the wake of the overturned June 2006 decision against the SNCF, 200 other families filed similar compensation claims.

On March 20, 2007, the Global News Service for the Jewish People reported that more than 7,000 individuals (not all were Jewish and not all were from France) signed a petition asking for political asylum in the United States because of the dangers they faced from anti-Semitism in the country. News of the petition was met with outrage by most Jewish community spokespersons in the country. "This petition is bizarre, stupid, and out of place," said the CRIF director in a subsequent interview with Israel's *Ma'ariv* newspaper. "I don't feel threatened . . ., and the authorities are doing everything they can to protect the Jewish community. Jews don't need this kind of petition."

On March 1, 2007, in a radio interview, former Prime Minister Raymond Barre appeared to justify the collaboration of Vichy-era government officials with the Nazi occupiers' deportation of Jews and defended right-wing extremist Bruno Gollnisch's right to voice opinions that falsify the magnitude of Nazi killing of Jews. An anti-racist NGO, SOS Racism, demanded that legal action be taken against Barre, but no reports were available to suggest that any such action had been initiated.

On February 8, 2007, in Chartres, Stellio Gilles Robert, a former member of the Nation of Islam in Paris under the name Kemi Semba and the leader of Tribu KA, a 30-member group of extremist blacks known to police for their racist rhetoric against Jews and whites, was charged with inciting racial hatred and anti-Semitic comments after yelling epithets at authorities. The Government has repeatedly closed down the organization's Web sites, only to have them appear again. During his May 3, 2007, court testimony, Semba affirmed his comments, contending that he had only cast aspersions on Zionism and had not made anti-Semitic statements.

Plaintiffs have petitioned the court to impose a sentence of 6 months, a fine of $13,300 (€10,000), and the deprivation of Semba's civic rights for 5 years, a stipulation that would prevent Semba from acting on his stated intention of running for office in the next municipal elections. The court announced plans to render its judgment on June 28, 2007, but had not done so by the end of the reporting period.

On January 18, 2007, Bruno Gollnisch, a part-time university professor in Lyon, member of the European Parliament, and vice-president of the extreme-right National Front, was sentenced to a 3-month suspended jail sentence and fined $6,500 (€5,000) for several comments made to the media in 2004 regarding the Holocaust. He questioned the use of gas chambers and stated, "I'm not contesting the existence of concentration camps, but as for the number of dead, historians might want to debate it." The judge also ordered Gollnisch to pay $73,300 (€55,000) in damages to the plaintiffs and to pay for the judgment to be published in the newspapers that originally printed his remarks. His 2005 expulsion from the university where he was teaching and 5-year banishment from teaching were confirmed on May 22, 2006.

On November 23, 2006, a policeman fatally shot one person and gravely injured another while protecting an Israeli fan from an enraged mob following a soccer team's defeat by Hapoel Tel Aviv. A group of 150 incensed fans confronted the departing Israeli team supporter with threats and anti-Semitic epithets.

On November 9, 2006, arsonists set fire to a Jewish school in Gagny, north of Paris. The fire caused little damage, in contrast to an arson attack on the same school in 2003 that destroyed 32,000 square feet of the school. Police opened an investigation. Days afterward, then-president Chirac announced a tougher policy to combat anti-Semitism.

Following the February 13, 2006, kidnapping and killing of a young Jewish man, Ilan Halimi, several anti-Semitic incidents were reported, many in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles. Previously unreported incidents include the following: On March 12, 2006, vandals broke into a synagogue in Sarcelles and threw religious objects to the ground; on March 6, 2006, in Lyon, a Jewish pupil was attacked and kicked in the face by four youths, subsequently in custody for violence and injury "with anti-Semitic character."

On October 23, 2006, the local police tribunal of Colmar fined the main suspect in the 2004 cemetery desecration of 127 graves in the Jewish cemetery in Herrlisheim $930 (700 €), plus one euro damages, for sending anti-Semitic letters to the Haut-Rhin consistory of Jews and two others in the Jewish community.

On July 12, 2006, a higher court overruled the 2005 Versailles Court of Appeals verdict against the authors and publisher of a 2002 article for "racial defamation" due to the article's alleged anti-Semitic content which violated a 1990 anti racism law. The higher court annulled the racial defamation judgment, stating that the published text was the expression of an opinion in an ideological debate.

The Government took other steps to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance, particularly among young people; however, some groups asserted that the judicial system was lax in its sentencing of anti-Semitic offenders. Schools emphasized the need for tolerance, and copies of the film "Shoah" were distributed to all high schools for use in history and civics classes. Many schools feature commemoratory plaques detailing Nazi deportation of children during the war.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Senior Government officials, up to and including former president Chirac and President Sarkozy, have strongly denounced religious discrimination, intolerance, and extremism, and in particular on March 11, 2007, at the annual CRIF dinner where the guest list included the country's most influential politicians and public servants. Throughout his term as Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy took an active public role in denouncing and combating anti-Semitism wherever he encountered it, including personally overseeing the dismantlement last year of the Web site operated by the anti-Semitic group, Tribu KA. Moreover, in the first 5 months of 2007, according to the Jewish Consistory, there was almost a 30 percent drop in anti-Semitic incidents from the same period in 2006 (112 incidents versus 158).

On March 22, 2007, a court ruled in favor of satirical weekly, *Charlie Hebdo*, which had published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, rejecting accusations by Islamic groups who accused the paper of inciting racial hatred. The court sided with arguments advanced by the public prosecutor that freedom of expression laws covered the paper's actions and that the cartoons were a critique of fundamentalism rather than Islam in general. The cartoons, originally published in 2005 by a Danish daily, provoked violent protests in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East; several European newspapers reprinted them as affirmation of free speech.

On March 21, 2007, the Lyon school board head who opposed the opening of the country's second Muslim school lost his position after losing a contentious struggle

over the opening of the "al-Kindi" Islamic Association's Muslim high school on February 28, 2007. The official had vigorously opposed the new high school, citing safety and environmental concerns and on October 4, 2006, had denied the school's original application. The denial was followed by demonstrations and sit-ins by Muslim organizations and their supporters.

On February 12, 2007, Alpes Maritimes Department President Christian Estrosi launched "Alpes Maritimes Fraternité," an "informal" structure designed to promote interreligious dialogue, harmony, and respect. The group will receive free office space from the Conseil General. Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant representatives attended the launch ceremony. The new group plans to hold periodic meetings, issue statements based exclusively on consensus, and engage in limited activities, such as issuing an ecumenical calendar and sponsoring historical colloquia.

Public schools made an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions.

On February 20, 2006, following the February 2006 killing of Ilam Halimi, then-Prime Minister de Villepin highlighted current and planned Government efforts to combat anti-Semitism and other religiously motivated crimes in an address to CRIF representatives. These plans would take place over the next 2 years, and if carried out, would represent a good-faith effort to promote religious and ethnic tolerance.

On December 8, 2006, according to a Paris LCI Television report, a court sentenced arsonists to jail for up to 5 years for destroying the Annecy mosque and a prayer hall in 2004. The mosque representative accepted the arsonists' apologies and forgave them. It was reported that the prison terms were accompanied by suspended sentences and probationary periods for each of those sentenced.

According to a May 13, 2007, conversation with Embassy officials, Rabbi Michel Serfaty, co-President of the Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association (AJMF), continued his efforts to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding by meeting with Muslim local officials and religious counterparts. Rabbi Serfaty's efforts include sponsoring international trips to Holocaust sites for French Muslim students.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Although there were anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the period covered by this report, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom and to maintain open lines of communication among different faith communities. The Council of Christian Churches in France, composed of three Protestant, three Catholic, and three Orthodox Christian representatives, 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 addresses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

Please see the Anti-Semitism section above for reports of anti-Semitic incidents. Throughout 2007 there have been weekly reports in the press of cemetery desecrations of all religious groups. On May 24, 2007, a court convicted the author of racially motivated attacks and cemetery profanation; he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He had attempted to kill two citizens of North African origin and had profaned 62 Jewish tombs in a Lyon cemetery in 2004.

Members of the Arab-Muslim community experienced incidents of harassment and vandalism. However, the situation improved in 2006, during which, according to the NCCHR, there were 344 racist (often including anti-Islamic) acts recorded, a decrease from the 471 committed in 2005. The trend was also reflected in a drop in the number of violent incidents (64 in 2006 as opposed to 88 in 2005). Far-right extremists were responsible for 26 of the 42 violent racist incidents aimed at individuals of North African origin. The Government recorded 192 threats made against individuals of North African origin, of which 65 were explicitly anti-Islamic (up from 56 such threats in 2005). Violent racist incidents on the island of Corsica, which made up 27 percent of the attacks in 2005, comprised only 5 percent of the incidents in 2006.

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Muslim headscarves may have led to incidents of discrimination against Muslim women. Members of the Muslim community again alleged that, when wearing headscarves, they were refused service by private businesses. Media reports indicated that some companies discouraged female employees from wearing the headscarf or encouraged them to wear a bandanna in its place.

On May 10, 2007, a court sentenced two individuals to 2 years in prison (with eligibility for parole after 1 year) for profaning 51 Muslim graves and the ossuary

in the country's largest military cemetery, Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, on April 19, 2007.

On October 23, 2006, vandals profaned the future Mosque of Belfort by leaving a pig's head in a window. Muslim worshippers also discovered posters of the National Front on the door of their temporary prayer room. The construction of the mosque, which was scheduled to open in 2007, was a source of controversy.

On January 8, 2007, an administrative court in Paris ruled that a nationalist group, Solidarity of the French, could no longer continue to hand out "pig soup," made with bacon and pig parts, to the homeless. On January 3, 2007, an earlier ruling had permitted the provision of the soup to continue. The mayor of Paris had condemned this ruling. Many saw the soup as a blatant act of racism, as it forbidden for those in the Islamic and Jewish communities to eat pork. Paris police shut down the operation a month earlier.

Plans to open the country's fifth private Muslim school in the fall of 2007 in a Paris suburb caused controversy among local political leaders. Muslim community spokespeople predicted a profusion of private confessional schools in France following the 2004 law banning conspicuous religious symbols in public schools, but almost 5 years later this movement has not taken place. As of early 2007, the Ministry of Education recognized four private confessional schools nationwide.

According to September 29, 2006, press reports, a public high school teacher and writer from Saint-Orens-de-Gameville (near Toulouse), who attacked the Prophet Muhammad and Islam in a newspaper commentary, was forced to go into hiding under police protection after receiving a series of death threats, including one diffused on a radical Islamist online forum. Then-Prime Minister de Villepin called the threats "unacceptable," adding: "We are in a democracy. Everyone has the right to express his views freely, while respecting others, of course." An official investigation was opened.

On September 24, 2006, in the opening days of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, arsonists set fire to a mosque in Quimper after first painting six crosses on the building. On the same day, a mosque in Carcassonne was covered by 50 crosses and slogans, including some colloquial slurs for Arabs. The anti-racist group, Mrap, declared that the far right has contributed "to create a climate" that can lead to such acts by focusing on "the theme of the Islamization" of the country.

Racism and religious intolerance in Corsica remained a concern. On October 17, 2006, the penal court for minors of Paris gave 12 members of the armed group Clandestini Corsi jail sentences of 6 months to 7 years for 7 attacks against the Muslim community between March and September 2004. The court cited racism as an aggravating factor.

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on December 21, 2006, the mayor of a city in Midi-Pyrénées received a letter declaring the manager of a tourist information office as a member of "one of the most dangerous sects" in the country because he is a Jehovah's Witness.

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on December 20, 2006, a teacher in a school in Provence ordered students who were Jehovah's Witnesses to leave the classroom.

On December 18, 2006, representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization asserted that 78 of their places of worship had been vandalized since the beginning of the year. On October 20, 2006, a place of worship was burned to the ground in Villefranche sur Saone. The Jehovah's Witnesses attributed these and earlier attacks in part to a 1996 Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry Report that described them as a "dangerous sect." On July 3, 2006, this designation was found to be a vague and superficial assessment by the Council of State.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination during the year. Scientologists continued to follow closely the growing body of precedent-setting case law from the ECHR in order to contest what they regarded as unequal treatment.

SECTION IV. U.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 met several times with Government officials responsible for religious freedom issues. These issues were raised regularly in meetings with other officials and Members of Parliament. Embassy officers also met regularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved in the issue. Embassy officials met with and discussed religious freedom with senior representatives from the major faith traditions as well as representatives of the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church. Embassy officials hosted visits

from Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the CRIF, the Central Consistory of Jews of France, the European Jewish Congress, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, the United Jewish Communities, and the Wiesenthal Center.

On April 10, 2007, the Ambassador, accompanied by invited alumni of a 2003 State Department "International Visitor Leadership Program" called on Paris's Central Jewish Consistory on the occasion of its 200th anniversary and then visited a photo exhibit of Jewish children deported during WWII. The ambassador's visit was a public demonstration of the U.S. Government's support for interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance—the theme of the 2003 group project.

The Embassy facilitated the visit of the Special Envoy for Combating Anti-Semitism and representatives from other Government agencies to discuss religious freedom issues with religious leaders and senior Government officials.

GEORGIA

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

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government continued to improve during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the free practice of religion in most instances.

Attacks on religious minorities, including violence, verbal harassment, and disruption of services and meetings, continued to decrease.

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 funded several projects to foster religious tolerance.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 25,900 square miles and a population of 4.4 million, including the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Most ethnic Georgians (who constitute more than 80 percent of the population, according to the 2002 census) at least nominally associate themselves with the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). Non-Georgian Orthodox groups accept the territorial jurisdiction of the GOC and generally use the language of their communicants (e.g., Russian, Armenian, or Greek). There remain a small number of mostly ethnic Russian adherents from three dissident Orthodox schools—the Molokani, Staroveriy (Old Believers), and Dukhoboriy (Spirit Wrestlers). Membership in the GOC continued to increase.

The Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC), the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), Judaism, and Islam traditionally have coexisted with Georgian Orthodoxy. Some religious groups are correlated with ethnicity. Azeris comprise the second largest ethnic group (approximately 285,000, or 7 percent of the population) and are largely Muslim; most live in the southeastern region of Kvemo-Kartli, where they constitute a majority. Armenians are the third largest ethnic group (estimated at 249,000, or 6 percent of the population), comprising the majority in the southern Samtskhe-Javakheti region, and largely belong to the AAC.

Approximately 10 percent of the population is at least nominally Muslim. There are three main Muslim populations: ethnic Azeris, ethnic Georgian Muslims of Ajara, and ethnic Chechen Kists in the northeastern region.

There are an estimated 35,000 Catholics, largely ethnic Georgians or Assyrians, and 18,000 Kurdish Yezidis. The ethnic Greek Orthodox community numbers 15,000 members. There are an estimated 10,000 Jews in the country. Protestant and other nontraditional denominations have become more active and prominent but comprise less than 1 percent of the population. The number of atheists who openly declare themselves as such is also less than 1 percent.

Several foreign missionaries from various religious groups are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Constitution recognizes the special role of the GOC in the country's history but also stipulates the independence of the church from the state. A 2002 concordat between the Government and the GOC also recognizes the special role of the GOC.

The Criminal Code specifically prohibits interference with worship services, persecution of a person based on religious faith or belief, and interference with the establishment of a religious organization. Violations of these prohibitions are punishable by fine and/or imprisonment; violations committed by a public officer or official are considered abuse of power and are punishable by higher fines and/or longer terms of imprisonment.

The Human Rights Protection Unit in the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) legal department is charged with protecting human rights, including religious freedom. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the PGO remained active in the protection of religious freedom, but some groups demanded greater activity. The President and the Ombudsman were effective advocates for religious freedom and made numerous public speeches and appearances in support of minority religious groups, although not all minority groups were satisfied with all aspects of their activities.

All major Orthodox holy days are state holidays. Although legislation does not mandate respecting the holy days of other religious groups, there were no formal complaints of illegal or improper social constraints on the observance of alternative religious holidays by other denominations.

Religious groups may register as either unions or foundations. A union is based on membership (a minimum of five members is required), while a foundation involves one or more founders establishing a fund for furtherance of a certain cause for the benefit of the particular group or the general public. In both cases registration is a function of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), which must grant or deny registration within 15 days of application; a refusal may be appealed in court.

Public schools offer an elective course on religion in society; however, the course deals exclusively with the theology of Orthodox Christianity, and the primary textbook approved for use in the course focuses on Orthodox Christianity to the exclusion of other religious groups. To address this, the Ministry of Education (MOE) began developing a curriculum for the course pursuant to a memorandum signed by the GOC patriarchate and the MOE in 2005. Although the MOE formed a joint working group toward this end, it included representation only from the GOC. The working group suspended activity in early 2007 without effecting any changes to the curriculum.

At the same time the MOE continued a separate project of textbook development to replace older textbooks that contain themes or materials considered inappropriate under legislation promoting freedom of religion. The new textbooks include materials on religious groups other than the GOC and discuss various religions in a neutral fashion. During 2007 new textbooks were scheduled to be introduced for grades 1, 7, and 10; in subsequent phases new textbooks were to be introduced for the other grades. In the national curriculum, schools must teach religion only as a component of a generally chronological or thematic treatment of history and culture, describing religious themes, texts, and beliefs without endorsement or favor. As early as the third grade, excerpts from religious texts or with religious themes may be taught in literature courses, for instance. MOE guidance states that such texts and themes are to be integrated with civics and morals teaching to emphasize interfaith tolerance and mutual understanding. Plans called for civics curriculum guidelines to make religious tolerance an element of mandatory civics training in the ninth-grade level.

Students may study religion and conduct religious rituals after school hours, but neither a teacher nor any outside party, such as a priest, may participate unless invited by the students. Prayers and other rituals may not be conducted during school hours.

The GOC routinely reviews religious and other textbooks used in schools for consistency with Orthodox beliefs, although this review is not conducted within the Government structure but rather as part of the GOC's pastoral activities. By law the GOC has a consultative role in curriculum development but no veto power.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government continued to improve, and Government policy continued to contribute to the free practice of religion in most instances.

The 2002 concordat between the GOC and the state defines relations between the two entities. The concordat contains several controversial articles: giving the patriarch immunity, granting the GOC the exclusive right to staff the military chaplaincy, exempting GOC clergymen from military service, and giving the GOC a unique consultative role in Government, especially in the sphere of education. However, many of the controversial articles require Parliament to adopt implementing legislation, which it had not done by the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no reports that the MOJ refused to approve applications for registration; however, some religious communities expressed dissatisfaction with the status that registration provided. The RCC and the AAC opposed registering as civil organizations, preferring to be recognized explicitly as churches or some other distinct status for a group based on religion. Several also expressed dissatisfaction with what they considered inadequate legal protection of their property rights and tax status under the registration law. In addition, they objected to the perceived favored status of the GOC under the tax laws, because it is explicitly exempt from certain taxes from which other groups are not. However, in practice the Government did not attempt to collect taxes on religious items or collect taxes from any form of religious or charitable activity, even if no specific exemption applies. The GOC itself was not content with all tax provisions, particularly the lack of a specific tax exemption for religious bequests.

Some religious groups complained that the registration law and tax codes do not adequately provide for transferring property already owned under personal title by adherents of the group, because the property transfer tax has not been suspended for such transactions in legislation, but only by policy. Government policy on property transfer tax of religious properties is that it be left uncollected on such transactions, regardless of registration status. Since this de facto exemption was not enacted in legislation, much religious property remained in private hands.

Government authorities claimed that the registration law provides an adequate balance between the demands of religious minorities and the desire to safeguard the special status of the GOC, which is enshrined in the concordat. The Government contended that creating a specific status for religious groups per se would result in unnecessary controversy between groups over whatever definition was adopted and that the registration law leads to effectively equal treatment of religious groups. In the Government's view, the registration law is religion-neutral in that its principal concern is only whether an organization is for profit or not for profit. The Government believed it would not be able to determine what is and is not "religion" and then apply the definition in a nondiscriminatory manner. The Government further contended that registered religious groups receive substantially the same legal protection of their property rights and tax status as the GOC, although authorities admitted that there may be confusion on the part of potential beneficiaries as well as on the part of Government implementers. Only largely symbolic preferences remained, befitting the GOC's status under the concordat, such as exclusion from payment of the value-added tax in the first place (versus paying and receiving reimbursement) and exemption from profit on sales of religious artifacts.

In May 2007 the European Court of Human Rights ruled against the Government for failing to protect members of Jehovah's Witnesses from violent harassment committed in 1999. No decision had been reached in a separate 2001 case brought by Jehovah's Witnesses contesting the Supreme Court's ruling that revoked the group's registration.

While members of Jehovah's Witnesses no longer considered it necessary to hold services in private homes for security reasons, they often continued to do so, due to delays in obtaining permits to build and occupy places of worship. During the period covered by this report, they used 25 buildings for small-scale assemblies but remained without access to a large-scale venue.

The PGO reported no success in its investigations of cases in which Jehovah's Witnesses were denied the use of privately owned facilities to hold religious conventions for large groups in 2005 and 2006. The PGO alleged that investigators could not identify the specific individual responsible for the denials.

Restitution of property confiscated during the Communist regimes remained a problem. During the period covered by this report, the Government did not return any churches to the GOC or to other denominations, nor did it return any mosques, synagogues, or meeting halls of other religious groups. However, restoration continued of GOC churches previously returned, in part with Government subsidies on the grounds that the buildings are national cultural heritage sites. The Government also provided subsidies for the maintenance and preservation of mosques on similar national cultural heritage site bases, but there was a perception among minority religious groups that state funding was not provided on a neutral and equitable basis.

Both the RCC and the AAC believed that property disputes were not resolved in a transparent legal process but rather on a case-by-case basis that distinctly favored GOC claims. For instance, the commission established under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture to resolve these disputes included a GOC representative but none from other religious groups. However, by mid-2007 the commission had ceased operation, and the Ministry planned to use disinterested expert opinion for assessment of future ownership disputes. Disputed ownership led to some interfaith disturbances and remained a cause for which extremist GOC priests and activists orga-

nized demonstrations and incidents, such as anti-Catholic agitation at Ivlita in late 2006 and early 2007 (see section III).

The RCC and AAC, as well as Protestant denominations, continued to have difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches, mostly due to the reluctance of local authorities to antagonize locally powerful conservative GOC supporters; however, the GOC itself did not oppose new church construction by other religious groups when such construction did not modify or obstruct GOC sites.

Ecclesiastical prison visits require concurrence with the prison administrations, which minority religious groups complained were difficult to obtain. During Easter 2007 the Orthodox Patriarch made visits to two prisons in Tbilisi and a penal medical facility, accompanied by the Minister of Justice; no Government minister accompanied clerics of any other religious group on such visits.

De facto authorities in the separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions remained outside the control of the central Government, and reliable information from those regions was difficult to obtain. A 1995 decree issued by the Abkhaz de facto leader that banned Jehovah's Witnesses in the region remained in effect but was not enforced, and the group reported no problems. Baptists, Lutherans, and Catholics also reported that they were allowed to operate in the region, but the GOC reported that it was unable to do so. The GOC patriarch expressed concern over Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) support of separatism in the region, such as specifically subsidizing Web sites that encouraged secessionist sentiments. The GOC also complained that the ROC's Moscow Theological Seminary was training Abkhaz priests. Despite the fact that the ROC recognizes the country's territorial integrity, the GOC patriarchate claimed that the ROC was sending in priests loyal to the ROC patriarchate in Moscow under the pretext of setting up indigenous Abkhaz churches.

Similarly, in South Ossetia Georgian Orthodox adherents were not able to conduct services in GOC churches located near the villages of Nuli, Eredvi, Monasteri, and Gera because these areas were under the de facto control of Ossetian de facto authorities.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, the non-GOC religious minorities reported substantial reductions in incidents of harassment, violence, or other direct pressures. None alleged continuing organized campaigns of physical abuse. All reported continuing media hostility, although most attributed it to the attitudes of individual media reporters rather than a systematic, organized media campaign.

During the period covered by this report, several cases of interference, threats, intimidation, or violence were investigated. In three instances cases were awaiting trial or sentence, in nine instances the investigations were ongoing, and in two others the investigation did not find sufficient evidence to support charges. The PGO has elected to exercise prosecutorial discretion to emphasize cases arising after the 2003 Rose Revolution, given its limited investigative and prosecutorial resources, although investigations of pre-2003 incidents were scheduled to continue where feasible. Minority religious groups pointed out that this could lead to the eventual elimination of cases that could be investigated under laws predating 2003.

In June 2007 there were incidents of violence directed against members of Jehovah's Witnesses. In one incident in the Gldani district of Tbilisi, police released a perpetrator detained by the victims when he and other unidentified individuals interfered with the distribution of religious literature by two members of the religious group in front of a meeting hall; the PGO investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. At the same meeting hall, unidentified persons wrote graffiti and threw rocks in a series of events, leading to separate complaints. In Chkhorotsku the PGO opened a criminal investigation against V. Sichinava for inflicting verbal and physical abuse against two members of Jehovah's Witnesses on January 29, 2007. In all, the PGO began nine new investigations and obtained sentences in five earlier cases, all involving some form of harassment directed against members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The five cases involved at least eight complainants and five suspects. The courts issued sentences ranging from a fine to 5 years' imprisonment.

GOC extremists heckled presentations on the history of a disputed RCC–GOC church (Ivlita) in early 2007; the PGO opened an investigation into the incident. GOC supporters threw rocks during an anti-Catholic demonstration in the winter of 2006 during the visit of a prominent Roman Catholic archbishop to the Assyrian Catholic church in Tbilisi, and an explosive device was reported seen but not found when police investigated.

Local Orthodox priests and public school teachers continued to criticize minority religious groups and interfaith marriages. Some also discouraged Orthodox followers from interaction with students who belonged to Protestant churches. Teachers at times ridiculed students who had converted to Protestant faiths, claiming the students converted because they were offered financial benefits.

The Ombudsman reported continuing problems with teachers reinforcing Orthodox theology through prayer in classroom and the display of icons and other religious symbols in schools. The MOE instituted a General Inspection Department authorized to deal with complaints of inappropriate teacher behavior, including violations of the religious freedom of students. During the period covered by this report, the MOE was in the process of formulating guidelines for periodic teacher recertification that would make such complaints an element for teacher retraining or disciplinary action. The General Inspection Department reported that 15 complaints of violations of religious freedom were filed in the first part of 2007, most of them concerning verbal abuse and insults. Investigation of the complaints was under way. In June 2007 the PGO received a letter reporting a series of alleged verbal and physical abuses of Jehovah's Witnesses children in school; the PGO referred the allegations to the General Inspection Department for followup.

Past incidents of abuse were committed by or attributed to a small group of GOC extremists, who were subsequently repudiated by the GOC or successfully prosecuted. The GOC excommunicated Paata Bluashvili, and on May 30, 2007, he was convicted of abuse, but when released on bail he did not return to custody. Two other extremists, Mkalashvili and Ivanidze, remained in prison. Other reported extremists remained at large and unprosecuted but did not commit any known violent acts during the period covered by this report.

The December 2005 incident at Tsinubani included in the previous report erroneously attributed anti-Pentecostal sermons to an Armenian Apostolic Church priest, whereas the priest was a priest of the Armenian Catholic Church. The priest was not publicly disciplined, but during the period covered by this report, he ceased such sermons.

There were occasional media reports of minor incidents of violence between ethnic Azeris and ethnic Georgians or ethnic Armenians; however, the incidents did not appear to be motivated by religious differences.

The Jewish communities reported no incidents during the period covered by this report.

The PGO's Human Rights Protection Unit monitors the progress of investigations and prosecution of cases involving violations of religious freedom. The Ombudsman's Office also monitors such cases and refers them to the PGO. Statistics of complaints received by the Ombudsman showed that violations declined to nearly half the level of previous years.

In May 2007 in Tbilisi, the President spoke out publicly at a conference in favor of religious tolerance, mostly as it applies to interethnic tensions. The President also intervened when a church under construction in Adjara was demolished for lack of proper building permits, ordering resumption of construction.

In April 2007 the GOC patriarch visited Dubai to demonstrate GOC support for mutual tolerance and respect between the GOC and 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 officials, including the Ambassador, also frequently met with representatives of Parliament, various religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with religious freedom matters.

The Embassy funded several projects to foster religious tolerance, including research grants, visitor program presentations, and speaker program sponsorships. For instance, in July 2006 the U.S. Government began funding a 4-year, $2.7 million project to promote an increased sense of national unity among citizens through support to the Government in forming its national integration strategy and action plan, empowering citizens and organizations to effectively discuss, debate, and resolve a range of matters related to building a cohesive multiethnic, multifaith nation. While inclusion of ethnic minorities is the focus of this activity, promoting

interfaith tolerance is an important component of the work. The project provides technical assistance, diversity training, and small grants to local NGOs, and it also supports a weekly talk/variety show on public television dedicated to integration and tolerance issues.

An Embassy grant assisted in the production of a local documentary film on Muslim life aimed at overcoming cultural differences and difficulties between Christians and Muslims in the country.

GERMANY

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respected this right in practice with some exceptions.

There were positive developments with respect to court decisions supporting religious freedom during the period covered by this report, but important religious freedom concerns remained. Courts made favorable decisions in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and the Unification Church. Important religious concerns included the organization of Islamic religious instruction in schools; social and governmental (federal and state) treatment of certain religious minorities, notably Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as Muslims; and bans in certain states on the wearing of headscarves by female Muslim teachers in public schools as part of the clarification of the role and status of Islam in the country.

Right-wing extremists committed politically motivated crimes against minorities including religious groups as well as anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic acts. Cemeteries were desecrated, and Muslim communities sometimes suffered discrimination in the location of mosques and allotments of land for cemeteries. Many members of civil society engaged in discussions about Muslim integration. The Roman Catholic and Evangelical churches continued to use "sect commissioners" to warn the public of dangers from some minority religious groups such as the Unification Church, Scientologists, and Transcendental Meditation practitioners. Scientologists continue to find "sect filters" used against them in employment as well as discrimination in political party membership.

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 religious groups and relevant Government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 137,847 square miles and a population of 82 million. There are no official statistics on religious groups; however, unofficial estimates and figures provided by religious organizations give an approximate breakdown of the membership of the country's denominations. The data below are compiled from various sources and are for 2005, which is the latest available data, unless otherwise noted.

The Roman Catholic Church has a membership of 26.2 million. The Evangelical Church, a confederation of the Lutheran, Uniate, and Reformed Protestant Churches, has 26.9 million members. Together, these two churches account for nearly two-thirds of the population.

The following list consists of other religious communities comprising more than 0.1 percent of the population. Protestant Christian denominations include: New Apostolic Church, 400,000; Ethnic German Baptists from the former Soviet Union (FSU), 300,000 to 380,000; and Baptist, 86,500. Muslims number 3.5 million (2006), including Sunnis, 2.5 million; Alevis, 410,000; and Shiites, 225,000. Of these an Interior Ministry study indicated that 4,000 native citizens converted to Islam between July 2004 and June 2005. Until 2004 the annual number of conversions was 300, largely Christian women native citizens marrying Muslim men; however, since 2004 the annual numbers of conversions have jumped into the thousands. There are approximately 2,600 Muslim places of worship, including an estimated 150 traditional architecture mosques, with 100 more mosques being planned. Orthodox Christians number 1.4 million, including Greek Orthodox/Constantinople Patriarchate, 450,000; Serbian Orthodox, 250,000; Romanian Orthodox, 300,000; and Russian Orthodox/Moscow Patriarchate, 50,000. Buddhists number 245,000, Jehovah's Witnesses 166,000, and Hindus 97,500. The Church of Scientology operates 18 churches and missions.

According to estimates, Jews number more than 200,000, of which 107,794 are registered members of the Jewish community. From 1990 to 2006, approximately

202,000 Jews and non-Jewish dependents from the countries of the FSU arrived, joining 25,000 to 30,000 Jews already in the country. As a result of a more restrictive immigration policy regarding Jews from the FSU, the number of Jewish immigrants decreased to 1,971 in 2006 from 3,124 in 2005. The new policy was designed in cooperation with Jewish organizations in order to better manage the integration of individuals into the Jewish community.

An estimated 21 million persons (one-quarter of the population) either have no religious affiliation or belong to unrecorded religious organizations.

Society is simultaneously becoming increasingly secular and religiously diverse. Regular attendance at religious services decreased. Regular attendance at Sunday Mass is reported at 15 percent for nominal Roman Catholics. Seventeen years after reunification, the eastern part of the country remains far more secular than the west. Only 5 to 10 percent of eastern citizens belong to a religious organization.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice with some exceptions. The Federal Government sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse either by governmental or private actors; however, discrimination against and unequal treatment of some minority religious groups remained a problem at the local level, in part because of the legal/constitutional structure of church-state relations. The structure for managing church-state relations, established in 1949, has been gradually adapting to the country's increasingly diverse religious composition.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the state, and groups may organize themselves for private religious purposes without constraint. However, most religious organizations are registered and treated as nonprofit associations, which enjoy a degree of tax-exempt status. State-level authorities review registration submissions and routinely grant tax-exempt status. Their decisions are subject to judicial review. Organizations must provide evidence, through their own statutes, history, and activities, that they are a religion. Local tax offices occasionally conduct reviews of tax-exempt status.

Religion and state are separate, although a special partnership exists between the state and those religious communities that have the status of a "corporation under public law." Any religious organization may request that it be granted "public law corporation" status, which, among other things, entitles it to name prison, hospital, and military chaplains and to levy a tithe (averaging 9 percent of income tax) on its members that the state collects. Public law corporations pay a fee to the Government for this tax service; not all avail themselves of it. The decision to grant public law corporation status is made at the state level based on certain requirements, including an assurance of permanence, the size of the organization, and an indication that the organization is not hostile to the constitutional order or fundamental rights. An estimated 180 religious groups have been granted public law corporation status, including the Evangelical and Catholic Churches, the Jewish community, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists, Christian Scientists, and the Salvation Army. In June 2006, after a 10-year legal effort by the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, the State of Berlin granted the organization public corporation status, but other states had not done so.

The Muslim communities remained an exception. In principle, the Federal Government is in favor of the states' granting public law corporation status to Muslim communities but has indicated a desire that Muslims agree upon a single organization with which the states and the Federal Government can negotiate. On April 9, 2007, in consequence, the four largest Muslim religious organizations announced the formation of the "Muslim Coordination Council." Whether and when this group would meet legal requirements for registration as a public law corporation was unclear and was to be decided on the state level; however, some observers, including the Federal Interior Minister were on record that the Muslim Coordination Council only represented approximately 10 to 15 percent of the total Muslim population, those who were traditionally observant.

Achieving public law corporation status has potential implications for Muslims in the country who wish a traditional Muslim burial, which consists of burial in a shroud, in a cemetery dedicated only to Muslim burial for eternity, and facing Mecca. These conditions conflict with either the country's law or custom, which require a coffin be buried in a cemetery in a rented plot, which will be turned over every 30 or 60 years. The state of North Rhine-Westphalia changed its laws to allow localities to determine shroud burial, but few Islamic cemeteries existed.

On May 2, 2007, the second plenary meeting of the Interior Ministry's Islamic Conference took place, after its launching on September 27, 2006, alongside the Government's parallel Integration Summit. The conference is a multiyear effort that addresses key areas of debate such as the legal status of Islam and policies such as those related to headscarves and girls' participation in athletic activities. It is an attempt to bring together representatives from the wide spectrum of the Muslim community, from the very traditional to the nearly secular. The conference can claim the increased public attention to Muslim integration as a major success. It is also debating the form of representation of the diverse Muslim community in negotiations with the Government about the role of Islam in society. On the core Government demand that Muslims accept the social values of the country, there was no consensus among Muslims. Participants, however, remained committed to the process and expected progress in the long run.

The Government provides subsidies to some religious organizations for historical and cultural reasons. In view of the country's culpability for the Holocaust, the states have accepted as a permanent duty the obligation to provide financial support to the Jewish community, including support for reconstruction of old and construction of new synagogues. Repairs to and restoration of some Christian churches and monasteries expropriated by the state in 1803 are financed by the Government. Newer church buildings and mosques do not generally receive subsidies for maintenance or construction. State governments also subsidize various institutions affiliated with public law corporations, such as religious schools and hospitals, which provide public services.

The 2003 "State Agreement on Cooperation" between the Federal Government and the Central Council of Jews agrees to supplement the funding received by the Jewish community from the states. Approximately $3.99 million (€3 million) is provided annually to the Central Council to maintain Jewish cultural heritage, to build up the Jewish community, and to support integration and social work. The Central Council reports annually to the Government on the use of the funds. The agreement emphasizes that the Central Council of Jews is meant to support all branches of Judaism with the funds provided.

Most public schools offer Protestant and Catholic religious instruction in cooperation with those churches, as well as instruction in Judaism if enough students express interest. The number of Islamic religion classes in public schools continued to grow. In principle, participants of the Federal Government-sponsored Islam Conference agreed that Islamic education should be made widely available. Education is a state responsibility and, in part because no nationally recognized Islamic organization exists that could assist in developing a curriculum or providing services, the form and content of Islamic instruction vary from state to state. Organizations providing Islamic instruction do not have public law corporation status.

Depending on the state, a nonreligious ethics course or study hall may be available for students not wishing to participate in religious instruction. Beginning in the fall of 2006, Berlin required participation in ethics class for middle school students and above, in addition to voluntary participation in religious instruction.

Islam classes in public schools were a controversial topic but were increasingly common throughout the country, except in areas where the Muslim population was too small to support them. Although no Islamic group had "Public Law Corporation" status that would entitle them to offer Islam courses, state governments recognized the need and demand for such courses and worked with local Muslim organizations to establish such courses. The details of the curriculum are worked out by the state government on a local basis. Commonly, the courses are taught in German, although in a few states Islamic instruction in Turkish is also offered. The number of such classes (now in the hundreds) has expanded rapidly in recent years. To provide teachers for these classes, training programs have been established at several universities. However, there was still a shortage of qualified teachers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the offerings have been well-received and are well-attended.

The legal obligation that children attend a school, confirmed by the Constitutional Court on May 31, 2006, and the European Court of Justice on September 11, 2006, and the related ban on homeschooling, was a problem for certain groups, such as Baptists from the former Soviet Union in Eastern Westphalia, due to concerns about sex education and the teaching of evolution. Generally, state authorities permitted such groups to establish charter-type schools.

There were no new developments in the Ministry of Defense efforts to develop a Muslim chaplaincy, which have failed because of an inability to reach agreement on a plan with the multiple Muslim groups. Independently, the Ministry has developed a code of conduct to facilitate the practice of Islam by an estimated 3,000 Muslim soldiers, which remained in effect.

On August 18, 2006, Parliament complied with a 2000 EU directive by enacting the General Act on Equal Treatment. The antidiscrimination law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, or race but also goes beyond EU guidelines to include discrimination based on religion, disability, age, and sexual identity. In 2002 the Federal Constitutional Court defined the Government's "warning" function with respect to nontraditional religions, ruling that the Government could characterize nontraditional religions as "sects," "youth religions," and "youth sects," and is allowed to provide accurate information about them to the public. However, the Government may not defame these religious groups by using terms such as "destructive," "pseudo-religion," or "manipulative."

Over the last decade the Church of Scientology has filed legal challenges against many of the public and private practices used to discriminate against Scientologists in public and private life. These have included suits against the observation of the Church by state Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC), against the use of the so-called "sect-filter," and against workplace discrimination. Many of these suits have been resolved at the initial level in favor of the Church; it has lost others. In nearly all cases, the initial decision was appealed by the losing side and final decisions are still pending. In some cases, the Church has argued that the losing party did not comply with court decisions in good faith and has gone back to court. Final, nationally binding legal decisions on the many issues before the courts remained years away.

Since March 1, 2005, applicants for citizenship in Bavaria have been required to fill out a questionnaire regarding their affiliation with organizations under observation by the state OPC, including Scientology.

On June 4, 2007, the Government lifted the ban on travel for Reverend Moon in keeping with a May court ruling. On May 4, 2007, the Higher Administrative Court of Koblenz ruled that the entry exclusion (refusal to issue a visitor's visa) for the founder of the Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, and his wife, Hak Ja Han Moon, should be lifted along with their listing in the Schengen Information System. On October 24, 2006, the Federal Constitutional Court rejected the Federal Interior Ministry's rationale for its 1995 immigration exclusion and the failure to issue a visa, which was based on the Government's characterization of Reverend Moon and his wife as leaders of a "cult" that endangered the personal and social development of young persons.

On March 21, 2007, a judge was removed from the case of a Muslim woman's request for an expedited divorce (a waiver of the normal 12-month waiting period) after denying relief from court costs and arguing, in part, that wife-beating is part of Islamic culture. A wide spectrum of society, including Government officials, denounced the decision as unfounded in German law and contrary to the norms of German society. The status of the case was not publicly resolved at the end of the reporting period.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice at the federal level contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Some state governments and federal agencies did not recognize certain belief systems, including Scientology, as a religion; however, the absence of recognition did not prevent their adherents from engaging in public and private religious activities.

Still pending in 2007 was the decision before the Higher Administrative Court in Muenster, regarding the Church of Scientology appeal of a 2004 Cologne court ruling, which stated that OPC observation was justified and could continue. The ruling of the Higher Administrative Court in Muenster will affect federal OPC activities, potentially affecting Scientologists nationwide. The Church of Scientology remained under observation (as it has been since 1997) by the federal and seven state OPCs, based on a stated concern that the Church's teachings and practices are opposed to the democratic constitutional order or violate human rights. However, in recent years many state OPCs have opted to stop their observations of Scientology; exceptions included Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, and Lower Saxony.

Several states publish pamphlets about Scientology (and other religious groups) that detail the Church's ideology and practices. States defend the practice by noting their responsibility to respond to citizens' requests for information about Scientology as well as other subjects. The pamphlets warn of the dangers the Church poses to democracy, the legal system, and human rights.

In response to concerns about Scientology's ideology and practices, government agencies at the federal and state level and private sector entities established rules or procedures that discriminate against Scientology as an organization and/or against individual members of the Church.

On June 25, 2007, the Ministry of Defense indicated that it would bar Tom Cruise, a producer and actor, if he were to appear in a film about a war hero who stood up against the Nazis. A spokesman for Germany's Ministry of Defense issued a statement that "Producers will not be allowed to film a German military site if Count Stauffenberg is played by Tom Cruise, who has publicly professed to being a member of" the Church of Scientology. After unfavorable international reaction, other sources at the Ministry indicated Cruise would be welcome to film, but some sites were not to be used in order to protect the solemnity of memorial sites.

On March 27, 2007, Minister-President of Baden-Wuerttemberg Guenther Oettinger demanded that actor and Scientologist John Travolta be uninvited from a guest appearance on "Wanna Bet?" a popular television show seen by an average of approximately 13 million viewers. Oettinger expressed concern that Travolta might use the show as an opportunity to promote Scientology. Travolta appeared on the show as scheduled, agreeing beforehand not to mention the controversial topic.

In March 2007 after the establishment of a Scientology center in Freiburg, the city's Christian Democratic council members drafted a city council resolution labeling Scientology a "major threat to the citizens and public life in Freiburg." The draft resolution also stated that involvement with the organization "threatens economic ruin and mental breakdown" and poses particular danger to "children, youth, young adults, and mentally unstable persons." An official from the Baden-Wuerttemburg OPC commented in a newspaper interview that "we are of the view that Scientology pursues anticonstitutional goals," adding that a ban on the religion was "under discussion."

In 2006 and 2007 Scientologists continued to report instances of societal and official discrimination. For example, on March 6, 2007, Hannover's Lord Mayor asked real estate agents and property owners to avoid supporting the Church of Scientology by refusing to sell or rent the organization a building in the city where they could found a branch office, saying "Scientologists are explicitly undesired in Hannover." The Lord Mayor conceded that the city's legal leeway to prevent the settlement was limited.

On January 13, 2007, the Church of Scientology celebrated the opening of a large, new Scientology Center in Berlin. There were indications that the city of Berlin refused for political reasons to issue permits to the Church to mark the opening with a parade and outdoor rally. The opening also provoked media scrutiny and political commentary; for example, local politicians expressed concern in the press that the Scientology center would endanger the well-being of residents.

A large number of Muslim organizations, including some that profess to be engaged in specifically and solely peaceful religious, social and/or cultural activities, were under observation by state and federal OPCs.

Since June 2007 a modified questionnaire has been distributed in Baden-Wuerttemburg to those seeking to become naturalized citizens. The questions previously in the 2006 version about sexual orientation were removed and the new content addresses attitudes on illegal activities such as membership in an extremist organization and forced marriages. Also, the questions are now directed to all immigrants and not just Muslims. The new version of the questionnaire has been approved by Muslim associations. Previously authorities in Baden-Wuerttemberg required residents seeking naturalization to complete a questionnaire concerning their political and moral beliefs and their adherence to the Constitution. The questionnaire led to protests from the political opposition and from independents such as Paul Spiegel, then chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Muslim organizations in Baden-Wuerttemberg announced plans to take the issue to the Federal Constitutional Court. Critics viewed the questionnaire, which included questions on attitudes toward women's and gay rights, terrorism, and other social issues, as discriminating against Muslim immigrants.

By June 30, 2007, eight states enacted laws banning female Muslim teachers from wearing headscarves at work, when the Federal Constitutional Court cleared the way in 2003 for the state legislation. New legislation generally used language that could be applied to wearing any symbol that could be taken as a rejection of constitutional values or as a symbol of oppression.

In February 2007 the Bremen higher administrative court nullified the lower court's July 2006 decision that the suspension of a teacher who wore a headscarf was discriminatory and ruled that the Bremen school law's ban on the wearing of headscarves was constitutional. In a June 2006 appeal the Bremen administrative court had called on the Education Ministry to prove that a trainee teacher wearing her headscarf would concretely jeopardize school peace.

On January 15, 2007, the Bavarian Constitutional Court upheld a ban on Muslim teachers wearing headscarves in school while allowing teaching nuns to continue to

wear habits and added that the application of the law did not violate religious freedom and was not discriminatory.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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.

Anti-Semitism

The activities of right-wing extremist organizations, whose platforms include anti-Semitism among other forms of intolerance, increased significantly. The Jewish community reported a marked increase in anti-Semitic sentiment and an extremely difficult atmosphere for the country's Jews, especially during the July–August conflict involving Israel and Hezbollah. In some cases anti-Semitic acts were perpetrated by persons of Muslim heritage.

Illustrating this anti-Semitic sentiment, 45 percent of respondents answered "probably true" to the following statement in an Anti-Defamation League poll taken in 2007: "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust."

According to the 2006 OPC report, the total number of registered anti-Semitic crimes dropped from 1,658 in 2005 to 1,636 in 2006 (a 1.3 percent decrease). Among these, the number of violent crimes dropped from 49 to 43. This was at apparent odds with the reports by the Jewish community. There were also reports of anti-Semitic graffiti that included the use of swastikas. The Stephen Roth Institute Report on Anti-Semitism Worldwide for 2006 mentioned the country in the context of violence and anti-Semitic acts, indicating that "acts of violence remained high," with anti-Semitic acts reported regularly, mainly "harassment," and cemetery vandalizing as well as the desecration of Holocaust monuments. Federal authorities generally responded to combat anti-Semitic offenses.

Desecration of Jewish cemeteries or other monuments was the most widespread anti-Semitic act. For example, on March 8, 2007, 63 tombstones were destroyed at a Jewish cemetery in Diesbeck. Two men were arrested in connection with this act. In 2006 authorities conducted 257 investigations of such incidents and made 29 arrests.

On March 8, 2007, a court in Magdeburg sentenced five men to fines and 9 months of probation for the burning on June 24, 2006, of *The Diary of Anne Frank* at a summer festival in Pretzien, a small town in the eastern part of the country; however, two were acquitted for lack of evidence. In late November 2006, prosecutors had charged seven suspected neo-Nazis with incitement and disturbing the peace of the dead for burning the copy of Anne Frank's diary.

On February 25, 2007, a Jewish kindergarten in Berlin-Charlottenburg was the target of an anti-Semitic assault by Nazi sympathizers. The perpetrators defaced the building with swastikas and slogans recalling the horrors of the Holocaust and threw a smoke bomb into the kindergarten, which did not ignite. Police advertised a reward for information about the perpetrators, placed the site under increased protection, and continued to investigate.

In October 2006 several adolescents in Parey (Saxony-Anhalt) forced a classmate to walk in the school yard wearing a large sign during lunch recess which read, "In this town I'm the biggest swine because of the Jewish friends of mine," a phrase used during the Nazi era to humiliate citizens with Jewish spouses or friends.

On September 26, 2006, the players of the Jewish club TuS Makkabi Berlin stopped a soccer game as a result of taunts and the singing of anti-Semitic songs by spectators.

Authorities strongly condemned all anti-Semitic acts and devoted significant resources to investigating incidents and prosecuting perpetrators. Authorities ran a variety of tolerance-education programs, many focusing on anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The programs received input and assistance from the Jewish community and organizations. The state also provided 24-hour police protection at synagogues and many other Jewish institutions.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Several notable court decisions in 2006 and 2007 (see Legal/Policy Framework section) demonstrated that previous cases were resolved in case law establishing new policy in favor of religious freedom when implemented.

The Federal Government promoted tolerance by establishing dialogues with representatives of immigrant and Muslim groups at the Chancellor and Interior Minister levels on the integration of minorities and immigrants and on Islamic matters.

The Government monitored right wing extremists, conducted investigations into anti-Semitic crimes, and at times banned extremist groups deemed a threat to pub-

lic order. Authorities sought to address right-wing extremism by conducting a variety of education programs to promote tolerance, many focusing on anti-Semitism.

The Government permitted the Church of Scientology to open a new center in Berlin in December 2006.

The city-state of Berlin accorded public corporation status to the Jehovah's Witnesses in June 2006, but it was not reported in some quarters until July 2006.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of continuing societal discrimination and hostility towards some minority religious groups (see Section II).

In 2006 the federal OPC recorded 17,597 right-wing extremist "politically motivated crimes" (PMCs), which included 1,047 violent crimes. The Federal Criminal Investigation Office (BKA) defines "politically motivated crimes" as offenses related to the victims' ideology, nationality, ethnicity, race, skin color, religion, worldview, ancestry, sexual orientation, disability status, the parents, or social status. The 2006 OPC report included 2,369 left-wing PMCs, 477 PMCs by foreigners, and 168 other types of PMCs. The report listed 182 right-wing extremist organizations and groups (183 in 2005). Authorities estimated membership in these groups, plus right wing extremists who remain unorganized, to be approximately 38,600.

A degree of anti-Semitism based on religious doctrines and historic anti-Jewish prejudice continued to exist. Far-right political organizations added claims that Jews were behind modern social and economic trends, such as globalization, which some Germans find disorienting or dangerous. While most anti-Semitic acts were attributed to neo-Nazi or other right-wing extremist groups or persons, recent anti-Semitic incidents indicated that Arab youths were increasingly behind attacks on and harassment of Jews.

Jewish nongovernmental organizations, such as the Central Council of Jews, provided input and assistance on a variety of Government-sponsored tolerance education programs focusing on anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

The rise of a substantial Muslim minority at times led to social conflict with religious, ethnic, and cultural overtones. Commonly, this included local resistance to the construction of mosques, leasing land for Muslim cemeteries, or disagreements over whether Muslims may use loudspeakers in residential neighborhoods to call believers to prayer. Authorities argued that many disputes also appeared to be related to compliance with construction and zoning laws; private groups (with some Interior Ministry financing) sought to better educate Muslim groups about these laws. Muslim groups, however, argued that such rules were often abused or that local opposition was motivated by anti-Muslim bias. Nonreligious (for example, noise and traffic levels) and security concerns were also factors.

At the end of the period covered by this report, controversy over the construction of a new mosque in Cologne, in North Rhine-Westphalia, gained national and international attention. The proposed new mosque, in addition to being the country's largest, would also house the national headquarters of the Turkish Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB). It has the full support of the mainstream local political players, including the city's mayor and the state minister-president. On June 16, 2007, the far-right, anti-immigrant populist party, Pro-Koeln, heightened an antimosque campaign, launched the previous month, with a downtown procession. Previous attempts by Pro-Koeln to block or protest construction of the mosque included circulating an antimosque petition among residents and disrupting a town hall meeting.

A prominent Jewish author and Holocaust survivor, Ralph Giordano, received death threats for his opposition to the mosque and was quoted as saying, "What kind of state are we in that I can face a fatwa in Germany?" Giordano's criticism of the mosque project brought the issue to greater national attention. Due to Pro-Koeln's framing of the mosque's construction as an attack on German values much controversy was generated by the building; however, most mosque building projects proceeded without controversy.

On March 21, 2007, a dump truck caught fire, prompting allegations of arson at the building site of the first mosque in the former Eastern half of the country (in a Berlin neighborhood, Heinersdorf). In January 2007 the construction of the Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque began after approval on December 22, 2006, despite protests from residents and widespread community and political opposition, in part because of questions about the sponsoring group's funding sources and sociopolitical orientation. Residents of the area complained that because very few Muslims live in the area, there would be a large influx of commuters from other neighborhoods in Berlin. Police were investigating the fire.

Local opposition in Munich delayed plans to build a new mosque there, even though the mayor and the Catholic Church across the street from the building site supported its construction. In December 2006 the Christian Social Union of Bavaria's minister-president, Edmund Stoiber, took actions to invalidate a preliminary permit that had been issued by the Munich government, a coalition of Social Democrats and Greens. The community was divided against the building of the mosque with the more conservative elements objecting to it.

In April 2007 SWR became the first broadcasting station in the country to broadcast an ongoing Islamic religious program, known as *Islamic Word*. Conservative political circles in Baden-Wuerttemberg sharply criticized the German-language broadcast.

There also remained areas where the law and Islamic practices conflicted with one another, such as the call to prayer, Islamic ritual slaughtering, and the segregation of older boys and girls during sports classes.

Beyond the Government's actions, the Catholic Church, and especially the Evangelical Church, have been public opponents of Scientology. Evangelical "Commissioners for Religious and Ideological Issues," also known as "sect commissioners," were particularly active in this regard. Additionally, several public and private organizations issued public warnings about Scientology afterschool study programs. The sect commissioners investigate "sects, cults, and psycho-groups" and publicize what they consider to be the dangers of these groups to the public. Evangelical sect commissioners were especially active in their efforts to warn the public about alleged dangers posed by the Unification Church, Scientology, Bhagwan-Osho, and Transcendental Meditation. The print and internet literature of the sect commissioners portrayed these groups as "totalitarian," "pseudo-religious," and "fraudulent." Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, Christian Scientists, the New Apostolic Church, and the Johannish Church were characterized in less negative terms but nevertheless were included in the Church's webpage on "sects." The Catholic Church also employed similar commissioners, who generally restricted their activities to providing counsel to individuals with questions about "sects."

Following the July 20, 2006, written order by the Hamburg Administrative Court, penalizing violations in the amount of $13,300 (€10,000) of the injunction against sect filters, Scientologists nevertheless were able to find eight copies of sect filters in use in the country in 2006. The Scientologists believed that companies continued to use such filters because they have been promoted and supported by the Hamburg government and other state governments such as Bavaria, leading to pressure to use them in the private sector.

Since the 1990s, four of the major political parties—the Christian Democratic Union, the Christian Social Union, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP)—have banned Scientologists from party membership. Scientologists have unsuccessfully challenged these bans in courts.

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, including the status of Islamic education and attitudes toward the Muslim community. The U.S. Mission has extensive contact with all religious groups in the country and meets frequently at multiple levels with representatives of religious groups to discuss their situation and concerns.

In response to anti-Semitic crimes, members of the U.S. Embassy closely followed the Government's responses and expressed the U.S. Government's opposition to anti-Semitism. Mission officers maintained contact with Jewish groups and continued to monitor closely the incidence of anti-Semitic activity.

The U.S. Government expressed its concerns over infringement of individual rights because of religious affiliation with respect to Scientology and other minority religious groups and requested that the Government implement or encourage the states to apply immediately all court rulings in favor of minority religious groups.

GREECE

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodox Church) as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice. While the Government generally respected this right, non-Orthodox groups sometimes faced administrative obstacles or encountered legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution and law pro-

hibit proselytizing and stipulate that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles.

Improvements in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government continued during the period covered by this report. Improvements included legislation passed in 2006 that allowed cremation (although cremation facilities have not been constructed yet) and repealed the law requiring consultations with local Greek Orthodox bishops before granting house of prayer permits to other religions.

There was some societal discrimination based on religion. Some non-Orthodox citizens complained of being treated with suspicion by fellow citizens or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 81,935 square miles and a population of 10.9 million. The Government did not keep statistics on religious groups. An estimated 97 percent of citizens identified themselves as Greek Orthodox. The other 3 percent of the population was composed of Old Calendarist Orthodox, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, Protestants, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Scientologists, Jews, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and followers of polytheistic Hellenic religions. There was no official or unofficial estimate of atheists.

The majority of non-citizen residents and immigrants were not Greek Orthodox. The largest groups were secular, Muslim, and Roman Catholic, and resided largely in Athens.

Foreign missionary groups in the country were active.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodox Church) as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice. While the Government generally respected this right in practice, non-Orthodox groups sometimes faced administrative obstacles or encountered legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution and law prohibit proselytizing and stipulate that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles.

The Government financially supports the Orthodox Church; for example, the Government pays for the salaries and religious training of clergy and finances the maintenance of Orthodox Church buildings. The Government also pays the salaries and some expenses of the three official Muslim religious leaders (muftis and acting muftis) in Thrace, and provides a small monthly allowance to imams in Thrace. In May 2006, representatives of the Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece formally objected in public statements, press releases, and appeals to the Government about the fact that the Government pays the salaries of religious officials from the Greek Orthodox and Muslim faiths but not of Jewish rabbis. The Jewish Community reported it has requested equal treatment on this issue from the Government. Government officials stated they have received no formal request on the issue.

The Orthodox Church, Judaism, and Islam are the only religious groups legally deemed to be "legal persons of public law." Other religious groups are "legal persons of private law." The primary distinction is that the Civil Code's provisions pertaining to corporations regulate the establishment of "houses of prayer" for religious groups other than the Orthodox Church, Judaism, or Islam. For example, other religious groups cannot own property as religious entities; the property must belong to a specifically created legal entity rather than to the religious body itself. Other religious groups also face additional legal and administrative burdens because they cannot function as legal entities. Scientologists and followers of the ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions practiced their faith under several registered nonprofit civil law organizations. The Baha'i and members of other religious groups have expressed their desire to operate within a legal framework as legally recognized religions, rather than as "associations." Members of religious groups that are classified as private entities because they are not recognized as legal entities in public law cannot be represented in court as religious entities, and therefore cannot bequeath or inherit property as a religious entity.

The law extends legal recognition as a private entity to Roman Catholic churches and related entities established prior to 1946. The Government recognizes the Orthodox Church's canon law, both within the Church and in such areas of civil law

as marriage. The Catholic Church unsuccessfully has sought Government recognition of its canon law since 1999. It has also sought unsuccessfully for a legal procedure to recognize its religious institutions built after 1946. In April 2006, the Ministry of Education and Religion established a committee to study the issue and propose a legislative arrangement to this problem for the Catholic Church. The Committee met in 2007 but has produced no results so far.

No formal mechanism exists to gain recognition as a "known religion." Recognition is granted indirectly by applying for and receiving a "house of prayer" permit to open houses of worship from the Ministry of Education and Religion.

Leaders of some non-Orthodox religious groups claimed that all taxes on religious organizations are discriminatory because the Government subsidizes the Orthodox Church, while other groups are self-supporting. Taxation legislation gradually abolishes, by 2007, tax on property revenues received by Orthodox churches and institutions. It is unclear whether this legislation might be applicable to other religious groups.

The law provides for alternative forms of mandatory national service for religious and ideological conscientious objectors. Conscientious objectors may, in lieu of mandatory military service, work in state hospitals or municipal and public services for two times the length of military service minus 1 month, typically 23 months. Conscientious objector groups and Amnesty International generally characterized legal provisions for conscientious objector status as a positive step, but criticized the longer service term as punitive. They also reported that uneven administration of the civilian service in some cases led to poor working conditions and noted that it would be preferable for the civilian service to be under civilian administration rather than under the Ministry of Defense.

Mandatory military service is 3 months for "repatriated" citizens, those who emigrated from the former Communist bloc and are of Greek origin, and 5 months for repatriated conscientious objectors. Repatriated conscientious objectors who have in the past completed military service in their country of origin and became conscientious objectors later in their life are ineligible for alternative service and have taken their cases to the courts. Those who became conscientious objectors after they performed their military service and were placed on reservist lists are not recognized, as there is no legal provision covering those who change their status after having completed military service. Several cases involving such conscientious objectors were pending before the Council of State, but were dropped after a change to the law exempted persons over 35 years of age from conscription.

Orthodox religious instruction in public, primary, and secondary schools is mandatory for all Orthodox students. Non-Orthodox students are exempt from this requirement. However, schools offer no alternative supervision for these children during the period of religious instruction; they sometimes attended Orthodox religious instruction. Some Thracian Muslims resident in Athens were lobbying for Islamic religious instruction for their children.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne gives Muslims in Thrace the right to maintain social and charitable organizations called wakfs, allows muftis to render religious judicial services (under the Islamic law Shari'a) in the area of family law, and the right to Turkish-language education. Thrace has secular Turkish-language bilingual schools and two Qur'anic schools funded by the state. Special consideration is given to Muslim minority students from Thrace for admission to technical institutes and universities that set aside 0.5 percent of the total number of places for them annually.

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 complained that hundreds of Turkish speaking children in the Athens area attending Greek language schools did not receive instruction of Greek as a second language; and therefore their ability to succeed in a scholastic setting in Greek is limited. There is one multicultural elementary "pilot school" in the Athens neighborhood of Gazi, which is part of the public school system, and provides for remedial Greek instruction. The school is funded by the school system and supported by a University of Athens project. Its teachers specialize in teaching Greek to non-Greek speaking children.

The Government recognizes Shari'a (Muslim religious law) as the law regulating family and civic issues for Muslims who reside in Thrace. The first instance courts in Thrace routinely ratified decisions of the muftis who have judicial powers in civic and domestic matters. The National Human Rights Committee, an autonomous body that is the Government's advisory organ on protection of human rights, stated that the Government should limit the powers of the muftis to religious duties and should stop recognizing Shari'a, because it can restrict the civic rights of the citizens to whom it is applied. In 2005 the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights ex-

pressed concern regarding the impediments that Muslim women in Thrace face under Shari'a law. In March 2006 the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Religion or Belief reported that they were informed of cases of both early marriages and marriages by proxy. Muslim female activists claimed that because all Muslim women in Thrace were married under Shari'a, they were therefore obliged to acquire mufti consent to obtain a divorce. The Mufti's decisions on requests for divorce are based on interpretations of Shari'a law that do not exist in written form and therefore cannot be appealed by the parties to the divorce. The courts routinely ratified most mufti decisions regarding divorce.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Education and Religion rejected the Church of Scientology's application for recognition and a house-of-prayer permit in 2000 on the grounds that Scientology "is not a religion." The Scientologists subsequently registered as a nonprofit organization because the group's legal counsel advised that the Government would not recognize Scientology as a religion.

Scientologists have not been able to build a house of prayer. Different groups that follow the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition applied in each of the last 3 years for house-of-prayer permits. In the past, the Ministry of Education and Religion had not responded despite advice from the Ombudsman for Human Rights telling the Ministry to respond. In September 2006, the Ministry did respond to one of these groups, stating that it "would delay its formal response due to the seriousness and the peculiarity of the matter." The Jehovah's Witnesses have five pending house-of-prayer permit requests dating from 2005. They sent a protest letter to the Ombudsman in December 2006 but have received no response as of the end of the reporting period. Members of the Jehovah's Witness community reported that two Greek Orthodox Bishops made requests to a local court that the Jehovah's Witnesses house-of-prayer permits be repealed. The matter is reportedly pending in the Greek court system. Reportedly, Jehovah's Witnesses filed another three applications for permits for Kingdom Halls in 2007. They had not received a reply and construction approval remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

Minority religious groups have requested that the Government abolish laws regulating house-of-prayer permits, which are required to open houses of worship. Local police have the authority to bring to court minority churches that operate or build places of worship without a permit. In practice, this happens rarely.

In November 2006, Nikodim Tsarknias, a former Orthodox priest who is now a priest of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, appealed his sentence to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In May 2004, Tsarknias was sentenced to 3 months in prison, a sentence which was suspended by the Aridea Criminal Court of First Instance, on charges of establishing and operating a church without authorization, after he held Macedonian language religious services without a house of prayer permit. Tsarknias's sentence could not be further appealed in the country. The case was pending in the ECHR at the end of the reporting period.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties in dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions. In contrast, 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 legally recognized as a "known" religion, officials continued to harass members during the period covered by this report. This usually took the form of arbitrary identity checks (although Jehovah's Witnesses representatives reported that this problem has largely abated) and local officials' resistance to construction of places of worship. In December 2006 the Supreme Administrative Court dismissed on non-substantive, technical grounds an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses regarding a property dispute over taxation rates involving their officially recognized headquarters. As a consequence, the case will be tried by other administrative courts. When the area was re-zoned, the Orthodox Church was exempt from the resulting re-zoning fees; Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that they should also be exempt.

Non-Orthodox citizens claimed that they face career limits within the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and the civil service because of their religious affiliations. In the military, generally only members of the Orthodox faith become officers, leading some members of other faiths who wished to advance professionally to declare themselves Orthodox. Few Muslim military personnel have advanced to the rank of reserve officer. There were reports of pressure exerted on Orthodox military per-

sonnel, such as being passed over for promotion if they chose to marry non-Orthodox partners, or if they get married in non-Orthodox religious ceremonies.

Muslim citizens in Thrace were underrepresented in public sector employment and in state-owned industries and corporations. While the underrepresentation was partly due to the lower education level and limited Greek language ability of the available applicant pool, minority activists blamed the lack of transparency in the civil service hiring process and endemic discrimination. Muslims claimed they were generally hired for lower-level positions. One Muslim minority member from Thrace held a seat in Parliament. In Xanthi and Komotini, Muslims held seats on the prefectural and town councils and served as local mayors. Thrace municipalities hired Muslims as public liaisons in citizen service centers and provided Turkish lessons for other civil servants. In January 2007, the Government announced it would establish a system for filling 0.5 percent of civil service jobs with Muslims. The Government had not implemented this system by the end of the reporting period.

The growing Muslim community in Athens did not have an official mosque or any official cleric to officiate at religious functions, including funerals. Members of the Muslim community used the official Muslim clerics in Thrace for official religious rites. Muslims in Athens and other cities traveled to Thrace or abroad for wedding ceremonies and some transported their deceased to Thrace or abroad for religious burials; those who could not afford to travel to Thrace had unrecognized religious rites performed. Remains buried in Greek cemeteries were subject to exhumation after 3 years, a practice overseen by municipalities because of limited space in cemeteries, especially in Attika. This practice has presented a problem for Muslims, as Islamic law does not permit exhumation of remains. The Orthodox Church also opposes cremation. The Mayor of Athens ordered the main cemetery of Athens to build a cremation facility. Construction had not started in the period covered by this report.

Although Parliament approved a bill in 2000 allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in an Athens suburb, construction had not started by the end of the period covered by this report. In October 2006 the Government passed legislation providing for the establishment of a mosque (without a cultural center) in the central Athens neighborhood of Votanikos, as opposed to the initial site chosen in an outlying suburb in Attica. Leaders of the local Muslim community have expressed satisfaction with the new location.

Differences remained within the Muslim minority community and between segments of the community and the Government regarding the means of selecting muftis. Under existing law, the Government appoints two muftis and one assistant mufti, all resident in Thrace. The Government maintained that it must appoint the muftis, as is the practice in Muslim countries, because, in addition to religious duties, they perform judicial functions under Muslim religious law for which the state pays them. The Government consults a committee of Muslim minority notables, which recommends candidates for the 10-year terms of office. Members of the Muslim minority objected to the fact that the Government was not legally obligated to follow the recommendation of the committee on the selection of the muftis. However, the Government follows the recommendations despite the absence of legal obligation.

Additionally, while some Muslims have accepted 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. The Government does not recognize these muftis, and the muftis do not have the right to perform religious rites with attending civic powers such as weddings, divorces or rulings on inheritance rights. Courts have on several occasions prosecuted elected muftis for usurping the functions of the official (appointed) mufti. In July 2006, the ECHR ruled that these prosecutions had violated the rights of the elected Mufti of Xanthi, who passed away in September 2006. On December 31, 2006, a number of male Muslims in Thrace conducted an election to replace the late Mufti of Xanthi. Some criticized this procedure suggesting only a low number of men cast votes and that women were prohibited from voting. A portion of the Muslim minority continued to lobby the Government to allow for the direct election of muftis.

Controversy between the Muslim community and the Government also continued over the management and self-government of the wakfs. This involved the Government's appointment of officials to serve on administrative boards that govern each wakf and the degree and type of administrative control. In response to objections from some Muslims that the Government's appointment of these officials weakened the financial autonomy of the wakfs and violated the terms of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, a 1996 Presidential decree placed the wakfs under the administration of an oversight committee appointed by the Government for 3 years as an interim

measure pending resolution of outstanding problems. The interim period has been extended every 2 years by Presidential decree.

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. In March 2007, the Government passed legislation writing off all tax liens against the wakfs amounting to approximately 6.5 million euros ($8.4 million) and eliminating future taxation of wakfs. The Government announced in January that it would allow the election of management boards by the community. Elections did not take place during the period covered by this report.

Members of missionary faiths reported police harassment and detention because of anti-proselytizing laws, but continued to note an improvement during the reporting period. Church officials from missionary faiths expressed concern that anti-proselytizing laws remained on the books, although such laws did not seriously hinder their activities. Police occasionally detained Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses for identity checks. In all cases, after one to several hours, the persons were released. Both groups report that the number of incidents of this kind of interference has decreased dramatically in recent years.

Some schoolbooks continued to carry negative references to Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition. The Ombudsman wrote a letter to the Ministry of National Education and Religions expressing the hope that the Pedagogical Institute (the competent authority for schoolbooks) would proceed with the necessary revision of the controversial chapters in the new editions of the schoolbooks. On October 12, 2006, the Ombudsman wrote another letter to the Ministry of Education and Cults, requesting to be informed of what had become of his suggestions.

The intra-Orthodox doctrinal dispute between Esphigmenou monastery on Mt. Athos and the Ecumenical Patriarchate that administers the region under the 1924 Charter of Mt. Athos continued during the reporting period. Esphigmenou is an Old Calendarist monastery that ceased recognizing the authority of the Patriarchate in 1972. According to the Political Governor of the Holy Mountain of Athos, recognition and commemoration of the Ecumenical Patriarch is the *sine qua non* for existence on Athos. As a result, the Ecumenical Patriarchate requested the eviction of the monks, which was upheld by a Supreme Court ruling in 2003 but never implemented. The monks appealed the ruling but in March 2005 the Council of State declined to rule on the appeal on the grounds that it was not competent, under the Constitution, to judge the ecclesiastic and administrative jurisdiction of the Patriarchate over Mt. Athos. In late 2005 the Holy Community governing Mt. Athos appointed a new Esphigmenou monastic order, recognized by the Patriarchate, to replace the existing order. In October 2006 a Thessaloniki court convicted nine Esphigmenou monks for disturbing the peace and illegally occupying the monastery, giving each monk a 2-year suspended sentence. In late 2006 seven monks were injured in clashes between the two monastic orders over control of Esphigmenou offices. The police did not intervene. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Esphigmenou monastery monks continued to occupy the monastery although they have lost legal access to assets and bank accounts of the monastery. Supporters of the monks claim that on the monastery's Feast Day in May 2007 the Coast Guard prevented pilgrims who had purchased ferry tickets to attend the feast at the monastery. The Political Governor stated that permission is not granted for people to visit the monastery because the remaining group of monks is legally and canonically incorrect. Supporters of the monks maintain that the Government is carrying out an embargo at the request of the Greek Orthodox Church Patriarch. Monks allege that the Government prevented food, medicine, medical personnel, and pilgrims from reaching the monastery. Officials from the Orthodox Church and from the office of the Political Governor of the Holy Mountain of Athos strongly denied such charges and cited daily boat traffic that delivered food and medicine to the monastery as well as other sites at Mount Athos.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees, apart from the problems of temporary police detention experienced by Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Most non-Orthodox religious leaders reported that their members (non-missionaries) did not encounter discriminatory treatment. Police occasionally detained Mormon missionaries (primarily from outside the EU who were undergoing the protracted residence permit process) usually after receiving complaints that the individuals engaged in proselytizing. In October 2006 police arrested and detained Mormon missionaries in Thessaloniki for 2 hours and then released them with no charges filed. Jehovah's Witnesses reported approximately 30 incidents of police detaining their members on suspicion of proselytizing during the reporting period. Mormons

and Jehovah's Witnesses reported that their interaction with the police improved during the reporting period because of Government training and instruction given to police personnel, and training undertaken by the missionaries which taught them to steer clear of anti-proselytizing laws.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were several instances of anti-Semitic articles or cartoons in the media. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Wiesenthal Center, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Greek Helsinki Monitor denounced the press for anti-Semitic articles and cartoons on several occasions in 2007. For example, on August 16, 2006, *Eleftherotypia*, the second largest daily newspaper, published a cartoon depicting an Israeli soldier praying with a rifle that was firing swastikas. Candidates for the political party LAOS made anti-Semitic statements during the campaign for municipal offices in the fall of 2006. The party's weekly paper *A1* published strongly anti-Semitic articles accusing the Israelis of genocide against the Lebanese people. A July 2006 editorial stated that anti-Semitic references as well as comparisons with the Holocaust were common in the press during the July–August 2006 conflict involving Israel and Lebanon, while some major media promoted the image of Israel as the "Nazi-state." On the other hand, Hezbollah fighters were often seen as "freedom fighters" and "resistance groups."

There were reports of vandalism of Jewish monuments. The Holocaust monument in Thessaloniki was vandalized during an antiwar demonstration in August 2006 and vandals destroyed the street signs at the square of Jewish Martyrs. In March 2007 swastikas appeared in a cemetery in Ioannina. In February 2007 swastikas were painted on an out-of-use synagogue in Veria, and, in August 2006 in Drama, on a Jewish monument. The Government condemned the vandalism. Police did not find the perpetrators.

Several times throughout the year, extreme right-wing groups painted anti-Semitic graffiti along with their symbols and organization names at multiple locations, including the Athens-Corinth and Athens-Tripoli highways, and other public structures. Unlike past years, authorities washed off the anti-Semitic graffiti in 2007. In February 2006, the prosecutor filed a lawsuit against the political party "Golden Dawn" for defacing public property and painting anti-Semitic graffiti during the course of the last several years on the basis of allegations submitted by the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), a local NGO. The Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece and the GHM both submitted testimony.

The Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece and the GHM continued to protest the reference to the Easter tradition of the burning of a life-size effigy of Judas, sometimes referred to as the "burning of the Jew," by state agencies including the Athens News Agency, the National Tourism Organization, and Agrotouristiki. The Jewish Communities and the GHM maintained that this tradition propagated hatred and fanaticism against Jews. The Orthodox Church and the Wiesenthal Center wrote formal objections to this tradition. The Jewish Community also protested anti-Semitic passages in the Holy Week liturgy. The Jewish community reported that it remained in dialogue with the Orthodox Church about the removal of these passages.

There was no progress on negotiations between the Jewish community of Thessaloniki and the Government to find acceptable restitution for the community's cemetery, expropriated in 1944 after its destruction by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Aristotle University, a public institution, was later built on top of the cemetery. American Jewish NGOs have expressed concern that the municipality's construction of a subway and other facilities in the area might disturb the Jewish cemetery. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki accepts assurances from local authorities that current construction will not cross the boundaries of the cemetery. The Jewish Community is working with the University to appropriately memorialize the site's Jewish heritage, and ensure that future University construction does not disrupt the cemetery. Current construction practices maintain that excavations and construction of public works take place under the close supervision of archaeologists and other experts, to ensure the protection of the site. The Jewish community reported that virtually none of the publicly-owned Jewish cemeteries throughout the country were being properly maintained (e.g., the grass was not cut, the fences were not repaired, and plants were not watered), though maintenance is required under Greek law.

The Government co-sponsored commemorative events in Athens and Thessaloniki in January 2007 for Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Parliament Spokesperson made a keynote address at an event organized by the Central Board of Jewish Communities at Athens' main synagogue. At another ceremony attended by the Mayor of Athens and several high-ranking Government officials, the Central Board of Jewish Communities unveiled a plaque at the statue of occupation-era Orthodox Archbishop Damaskinos to honor him for his efforts to rescue Greek Jews. The Ministry of Education distributed materials to schools on the history of the Holocaust to be read in all schools on Holocaust Remembrance Day, and informed schools of educational courses available by the Jewish Museum of Athens. Some leaders of the Jewish community criticized the fact that Athens remained the only European city to have been under German occupation that does not have a memorial to the Holocaust.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In January 2007 the Government announced that it would hire 240 imams in Thrace and pay their salaries, establish a system to fill 0.5% of civil service jobs with Muslims, and write off tax liens on Muslim charitable foundations. These policies were not implemented by the end of the period covered by this report.

On the advice of the Ombudsman for Human Rights, in July 2006 the Ministry of Education put an end to the practice of permitting Orthodox priests to hear religious confessions from students in the public schools.

In June 2006 Parliament amended an existing law and abolished the practice by which the Ministry of Education and Religion sought the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop on whether to grant house of prayer permits for faiths other than Orthodox. Non-Orthodox faiths had objected to this practice.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal discrimination.

The Greek Orthodox Church exercised significant social, political, and economic influence and owned a considerable, although undetermined, amount of property. Many Greeks assumed that any ethnic Greek was also an Orthodox Christian. Some non-Orthodox citizens complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

Members of minority faiths reported incidents of societal discrimination, such as local Orthodox bishops warning parishioners not to visit clergy or members of minority faiths and requesting that the police arrest missionaries for proselytizing. However, with the exception of the burgeoning Muslim population, most members of minority faiths considered themselves satisfactorily integrated into society. Organized official interaction between religious communities was infrequent.

Orthodox Church leaders have publicly supported the building of a mosque in Athens, although they were opposed to the cultural center. The leaders were concerned about a potential hotbed of radical Islam in the center of the city. The plans for the new mosque approved by the Government do not include plans for a cultural center. The Orthodox Church offered the Muslim community in Athens a piece of land for the creation of a Muslim cemetery; as of the writing of this report, the transfer of the land has not yet occurred.

In July, a large unofficial mosque opened in the Moschato neighborhood of Athens and operates without a house of prayer permit. The renovation of an old factory for use as a mosque was reportedly financed by a Saudi Arabian businessman.

In December 2006, Hare Krishna followers reported that for the second time members of the Orthodox Church stood outside of a hall where they were celebrating a festival and distributed pamphlets that were derogatory of the Hare Krishna faith.

On February 20, 2007, vandals threw three Molotov cocktail bombs at a Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall in Menidi, Athens. There was no damage. The police investigated the incident, but did not identify the perpetrators.

Some non-Orthodox religious communities encountered difficulty in communicating with officials of the Orthodox Church and claimed that the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward their faiths increased social intolerance toward their religions. The Orthodox Church maintained a list of practices and religious groups, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Protestants, Scientologists, Mormons, Baha'is, and others, which it believed to be sacrilegious. Officials of the Orthodox Church have acknowledged that they refused to enter into dialogue with religious groups considered harmful to Orthodox worshipers; church leaders instructed Orthodox believers to shun members of these faiths.

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. Embassy officers met with religious leaders and officials responsible for religious affairs in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education and Religion. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials discussed religious freedom with senior Government officials and religious leaders. The U.S. Mission also regularly discussed 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 met regularly with representatives of various religious groups, and investigated complaints of religious discrimination brought to their attention.

The Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission attended Holocaust commemorations in Athens and the Consul General attended Thessaloniki events. U.S. officers continued to monitor the issue of restitution of Jewish properties in Thessaloniki. The American Embassy in Athens, the Consulate General in Thessaloniki and the U.S. Department of State in Washington have worked closely with the national and municipal Greek authorities as well as the Thessaloniki Jewish community and NGOs to assure the protection of human remains in the Thessaloniki Jewish cemetery. The Embassy, Consulate and Department have encouraged the Jewish community in its efforts to engage Aristotle University, a public institution built on top of the expropriated cemetery, to ensure that future University construction is conducted with proper supervision and knowledge of the community and to honor the history of the property by memorializing the Jewish heritage of the site in accordance with the community's wishes.

The U.S. Embassy actively followed issues relating to religious workers' visas and property taxes.

The Embassy and Consulate General promoted and supported initiatives related to religious freedom. The Embassy and Consulate General used the International Visitor program to introduce Muslim community leaders to the United States and American counterparts.

The Ambassador and U.S. officials regularly visited religious sites and conducted outreach throughout the country.

HUNGARY

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, friction between the Government and religious organizations over recent laws affecting the funding of church-run educational and social institutions continued during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 35,919 square miles and a population of 10.1 million.

The 2001 national census, the latest survey available, included an optional question on religious affiliation, to which 90 percent of the population provided a response. According to the replies, the population is 55 percent Roman Catholic, 15 percent Reformed, 3 percent Lutheran, and less than 1 percent Jewish. These four are the country's historical religious groups. In addition, 3 percent of respondents identified themselves as Greek Catholics, and 15 percent declared no religious affiliation. The remainder was divided among a number of other religious organizations, the largest of which was the Congregation of Faith, a broad range of other Christian groups, five Orthodox religious groups, seven Buddhist groups, and three Islamic communities.

Foreign representatives from a variety of religious groups and missionary organizations are active in the country.

Data protection regulations impeded the collection of official statistics on popular participation in religious life; however, surveys and other evidence suggest that citi-

zens were less devout than the average central European. According to a 2004 survey by the Economic Research Institute of Hungary, 58 percent of respondents declared themselves to be "believers," and 55 percent responded that they believe in "God or the supernatural." Fifteen percent of believers declared that they attended religious services at least once a week, and 25 percent stated that they never did.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion, and under the law every registered religious group is entitled to the same rights. The four "historical religions" (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Jewish) receive 93 percent of state financial support provided to religious groups. Traditional groups also receive tax breaks.

The 1990 Law on the Freedom of Conscience regulates the activities of, and the benefits enjoyed by, religious communities; it also establishes the criteria for legal designation. To register, religious groups must submit a statement to a county court declaring that they have at least 100 followers. The court determines whether the new group complies with constitutional and legal requirements; if so, the court cannot reject the registration request. The requirements are easy to meet, and registration is essentially pro forma. While any group is free to practice its faith, formal registration grants rights, imposes obligations on operating educational and social institutions, and provides access to several forms of state funding. In 2006 eight new religious groups were registered, including Our Lady Love Church, Hungarian Chinese Christian Church, Holistic Church, Elisabeth Sisterhood, Hungarian Prophetic Church, Saint Camille Christian Church, Active Love Society, and Christian Community for Religious Renewal.

Relations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church are regulated by the 1990, 1994, and 1997 Vatican Treaties. These agreements also serve as a framework for regulating state relations with other religious groups. During the period covered by this report, a governmental arbitration committee and the Holy See were negotiating modification of the Vatican Treaty Regime. Both sides agreed that the 1997 treaty should be updated due to structural and administrative changes in public life, but they also believed the general context would not be significantly altered.

In July 2006 governmental reorganization made the Department for Church Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Culture responsible for religious issues. The head of the department is a senior political counselor who reports directly to the Minister on religious issues.

Citizens are able to donate 1 percent of their income to the religious group of their choice and receive a tax exemption. This applies to every legally registered religious group.

In addition to taxpayer contributions, the Government allocates public funds to registered religious groups. The Government supplements taxpayer contributions to registered groups in proportion to individual contributions by an additional 0.9 percent of total tax income. In 2006 this supplementary funding amounted to $66 million (HUF 12.2 billion). Further funding is provided for a range of activities such as the maintenance of public art collections, reconstruction and renovation of religious institutions, support for religious instruction, compensation for nonrestituted religious property, and assistance to church personnel serving the smallest villages. In 2006 this amounted to nearly $74.6 million (HUF 13.8 billion). The Government also provided financial support for church-run social services and schools at the same level as state-run institutions. In 2006 this form of support amounted to an estimated $362 million (HUF 67 billion).

Religious instruction is not part of the curriculum in public schools, but 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 in school facilities by representatives of various religious groups. While the Government makes provisions for minority religious groups to engage in religious education in public schools, the four historical groups provide the majority of after-hours religious instruction.

Easter Monday, Whit Monday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

State financial aid to various churches for educational and social services continued to be a source of contention in church-state relations. The 1997 Vatican Treaty and several other agreements obligate the Government to provide the same amount of per capita funding to church-run social institutions as it does to public institutions, such as schools and old-age homes. Under recent austerity measures, the Government significantly cut back public services, especially in education and heath care. The four historical religious groups claimed they faced discriminatory per capita funding for the public service institutions they operate, particularly schools. They called on the Government to equalize funding. Religious groups also criticized the Government for a perceived unwillingness to negotiate or communicate about improving financial regulations. In April 2006 three opposition politicians submitted a complaint to the Constitutional Court alleging that the 2006 budget discriminated against church-run public services with respect to central budget financing and thus violated the 1997 Vatican Accord. The court had not ruled on the case by the end of the period covered by this report.

Leaders of the Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches continued to complain that state financing for the maintenance of public art collections and other public services that the churches provide was delayed and severely reduced. The Government acknowledged the delays, attributing them to technical difficulties, but has indicated that the funding would be transferred in late 2007. Many church-run art collections were closed during the last 2 years due to the lack of state financial support.

The military chaplain service has permanent pastoral representation by the four historical religious groups. The Government also requires the military to provide pastoral care for members of other groups. The Ministry of Defense funds and maintains the chaplain service. The Roman Catholic Church and the Government were renegotiating the 1994 treaty that regulates military chaplain services. The renegotiation was based on recent fundamental changes in the military structure such as the abolishment of conscription and the increasing number of international missions in which the military participates. The Ministry of Justice regulates a similar system for the provision of religious services in prisons.

In 2005 the Government adopted a resolution making it possible to fast-track property restitution negotiations and close outstanding claims in 2006, instead of by 2011 as the original law set forth. Three religious groups (Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Budai Serb Orthodox Church) chose to use the new procedure; neither the Reformed nor the Lutheran Churches opted for the procedure. From 2006 until the end of the reporting period, 549 properties (worth up to $49.1 million or HUF 8.8 billion) were restituted, and $96 million (HUF 17 billion) was paid as compensation. The Protestant churches had 260 outstanding cases ($25.2 million or HUF 4.5 billion) at the end of the reporting period. Participants generally considered the procedure satisfactory. Members of the Jewish community viewed the restitution process as generally fair but wanted to see compensation paid for the estimated $2.3 to $18.6 billion (HUF 430 billion to 3.44 trillion) worth of heirless Jewish properties specifically excluded from the restitution process. They proposed setting up a joint commission including the Government and Jewish community representatives to discuss the matter.

In May 2006 the Data Protection Ombudsman published an open letter in which he expressed concern over the manner in which the Church of Scientology handles the data it records about its members, particularly the use of the so-called e-meter. The Ombudsman asserted that the Church was not sufficiently concrete in stating to what end the information is collected and that the waiver signed by members forfeits for all time their right to access information collected on them. The Ombudsman called upon the Church to fully conform to data protection laws. On June 23, 2006, a church spokesperson responded that the Ombudsman had overstepped his jurisdiction and interfered in the religious freedom of the Church. The Church also filed a lawsuit against the Ombudsman for refusing to release a copy of an official report by the National Bureau of Investigation on the use of the e-meter. On October 31, 2006, the Budapest Municipal Court refused to hear the case because it stated the case lacked legal basis. Upon closure of the Ombudsman's procedure, the report was released to the public on October 19, 2006.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism was reportedly on the rise in public discourse of political leaders and in the form of attacks on Jewish cemeteries.

The Jewish community stated that acts of vandalism in Jewish cemeteries increased during the reporting period. However, as in previous years, Jewish community leaders attributed most of the vandalism to youths and did not consider the incidents anti-Semitic, indicating that similar vandalism had occurred in Christian cemeteries as well.

Representatives of the Jewish community believed there was a rise in anti-Semitism towards the end of 2006. They expressed concern over anti-Semitism in some media outlets, in society, and in coded political speech. The weekly newspaper *Magyar Demokrata* continued to publish anti-Semitic articles, as did the more radical weekly *Magyar Forum*. There were numerous far-right Web sites in the country, many of which were openly anti-Semitic. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that the Government monitored the Web sites for content, because by law public display of symbols such as the swastika, hammer and sickle, and red star is prohibited.

Incidents of anti-Semitism were also observed during the demonstrations of September and October 2006 in slogans and speeches made by extreme-right leaders. Some participants in the antigovernment protests displayed images linked to the World War II-era right wing Hungarian Arrow Cross party, and Nazi symbols and chants were seen and heard. Some demonstrators erected a "wall of shame," which displayed a list of names of those thought to be responsible for the Government crisis. The list highlighted Jewish personalities. Some offenders threw objects in the direction of the Great Synagogue in Budapest.

Additionally, the Government expressed concern over the public display of the Arpad flag, whose history includes association with, or use by, the WWII-era Fascist Government. The opposition rejected the Government's claim, stating that the Arpad flag, as it appears at right-wing rallies, is not a symbol of the WWII-era Arrow Cross party since it lacks the Arrow Cross symbol and that the original Arpad flag dates back hundreds of years. The Jewish community also expressed concern that the Hungarian Soccer Federation was not doing enough to curb anti-Semitic outbursts among the core fans of a few soccer clubs. The Jewish community indicated that during the reporting period these types of incidents were more limited than in previous years.

On June 28, 2007, demonstrators interrupted a Klubradio broadcast in Debrecen and attacked a Jewish staff writer for Nepszabadsag. At least one demonstrator hit the victim and shouted that he should "return to Israel." Several demonstrators shouted obscenities and waved the Arpad flag, which is often associated with the political far right. Reportedly, police on the site did not intervene.

In December 2006 vandals spray-painted a Jewish community building in the city of Pecs with swastikas and Nazi slogans.

Police closed investigation into a vandalism incident which occurred on November 6, 2006, at a Jewish synagogue in Vac because they could not identify any suspects. Unknown offenders painted black paint over the fence of the synagogue and sprayed anti-Semitic graffiti, swastikas, and other Fascist symbols. They also vandalized a Jewish school, stealing a marble tablet presented to the school by the city to memorialize the Holocaust.

On July 28, 2006, two members of the Left-Wing Front-Communist Youth Alliance participating in an anti-Israel protest in Budapest carried Israeli flags defaced with swastikas.

In an interview on March 2, 2007, with the United Kingdom daily *The Times*, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany claimed that Fidesz chairman Viktor Orban was "benefiting from anti-Semitism in an attempt to derail the Government's modernization programs." Fidesz faction leader Tibor Navracsics vehemently rejected the Prime Minister's comments and challenged Gyurcsany to find one anti-Semitic member of Fidesz.

Just prior to the March 15, 2007 celebrations of the country's 1848 revolution, Peter Feldmajer, president of the Jewish federation Mazsihisz, urged members of the Jewish community to remain at home on March 15 for their safety. Other prominent Jewish leaders openly criticized Feldmajer's remarks, claiming that he had significantly overstated the danger.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued its strong efforts to combat anti-Semitism by speaking out against the use of coded speech by right-wing extremists, and the Prime Minister publicly stated that citizens also bore responsibility for the Holocaust.

After holding a successful conference in December chaired by the Minister of Education and Culture, in March 2007 the country passed the chairmanship of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research to the Czech Republic.

On April 16, 2007, the President attended the annual Hungarian Holocaust Remembrance Day gathering at Budapest's Holocaust Memorial Center. He stated that the Holocaust was an event which all Europeans must continuously remember, not just 1 day a year. The Prime Minister called on all members in Parliament to sign the "Declaration of Zero Tolerance" for racist and anti-Semitic remarks. The opposition also made an exception to its policy of walking out on the Prime Minister's remarks, out of respect for the occasion. All parliamentary parties signed the declaration, and it was submitted to the Parliamentary Library on May 8, 2007.

On April 15, 2007, Government and opposition politicians jointly paid tribute to Hungarian victims of the Holocaust at commemorations held at various places in Budapest. The Prime Minister led a procession of thousands of persons in the March of the Living. The Speaker of Parliament and the President of the Supreme Court attended the event along with representatives of all parliamentary parties.

On January 18, 2007, the Speaker of Parliament, President of the Supreme Court, cabinet ministers, members of the opposition, and a number of other public figures attended the commemoration of the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto.

Parliament passed Act XLVII, which took effect on March 31, 2006, and was scheduled to expire on July 31, 2006, but was later extended until January 2007. The act reopened the window for compensation claims from those individuals whose immediate relatives were killed in the Holocaust or were sent to Soviet forced labor camps. The Jewish communities welcomed the Government's decision and noted that Hungary is the only country that offers compensation in this manner. Eligible individuals may apply for a lump sum or pension worth up to $2,162 (HUF 400,000) for each parent, sibling, or child who was killed. During this period more than 97,500 claims from 60 countries were submitted to the Central Judiciary Agency. By the end of the reporting period, 10,500 decisions were issued and $9.2 million (HUF 1.7 billion) was transferred to the eligible applicants.

During the period covered by this report, the Office of the Prime Minister (PMO) continued to work directly with representatives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum regarding access to Holocaust-era archives. Under the direction of the PMO, a working group was convened with U.S. and Hungarian representatives in late November 2006. The working group met again in March 2007, and its work was ongoing.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Following a journalist's lawsuit in February 2007, the Budapest Municipal Court ruled that the state security archives could legally release secret documents on six religious leaders (three Roman Catholic bishops, a retired Lutheran bishop, a former Lutheran national supervisor, and the executive director of Mazsihisz). The journalist was investigating whether they had cooperated with Communist-era secret services. The court's decision indicated that all six were public figures because they could influence public opinion. On March 27, 2007, the three Catholic bishops filed an appeal with the Supreme Court.

Reports of vandalism or destruction of Christian and Jewish property increased, as did burglaries involving places of worship. In 2006 the National Police reported 352 cases of vandalism to cemeteries, compared to 216 in 2005. There were also 35 reports of vandalism in churches. Most police and religious authorities considered these incidents to be acts of youth vandalism and not indications of religious intolerance.

The weekly newspaper *Magyar Demokrata* continued to publish anti-Semitic articles, as did the more radical weekly *Magyar Forum*.

Christian churches and the Jewish community continued to organize regular events under the auspices of the Christian-Jewish Society, which brings together religious academics for discussions. Religious groups also demonstrated strong willingness to work together across a wide range of other areas to achieve common social or political goals.

SECTION IV. U.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 also discussed religious freedom with Members of Parliament, leaders of religious groups, and representatives of local and international NGOs that address issues of religious freedom. Embassy officers tracked closely the dispute over parochial school funding and the possible effect on clergy that proposed lustration legislation could have.

The Embassy continued to urge the Government to speak out against anti-Semitism and hate speech. In addition, in April 2007 the Embassy facilitated a visit by the Chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, who delivered remarks at the March of the Living, met with the Government leaders, and conducted a survey of a cemetery for possible restoration. The Embassy also assisted with a visit by another commission member, who delivered remarks at a Jewish cemetery dedication in Gyongyos on May 31, 2007.

The Embassy facilitated the transfer of Holocaust-era records to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and continued to lobby the Government at the highest levels for greater archival access for the museum. The Embassy also remained active on issues of compensation and property restitution for Holocaust victims. Embassy officers worked with Mazsihisz, the Hungarian Jewish Public Foundation, other local and international Jewish organizations, Members of Parliament, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the PMO on restitution issues and to promote fair compensation.

ICELAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is the state church, enjoys some advantages not available to other faiths and provides social services regardless of creed.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 39,600 square miles and a population of 307,000. The area surrounding the capital, Reykjavik, is home to approximately 60 percent of the population.

According to the National Statistical Bureau, 252,234 persons (82 percent of the population) are members of the state Lutheran Church. During the reporting period, 1,452 individuals resigned from the church, as against 240 new registrants other than infants baptized. Many of those who resigned joined one of the organizationally and financially independent Lutheran Free Churches, which has a total membership of 14,482 persons (4.7 percent of the population). The breakdown in membership is as follows: Reykjavik Free Church—7,009; Hafnarfjordur Free Church—4,757; and Reykjavik Independent Church—2,716. A total of 15,804 persons (5.1 percent) are members of 25 other small recognized and registered religious organizations ranging from the Roman Catholic Church (7,283 members) to the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (4 members). There are 16,744 individuals (5.4 percent) who belong to other or unspecified religious organizations and 7,997 (2.6 percent) who are not members of any religious organization. There are also religions, such as Judaism, that have been practiced in the country for years but whose members have never requested official recognition. The National Statistical Bureau does not keep track of Jewish community numbers, and there is no synagogue or Jewish cultural center; however, up to 60 persons attend occasional Jewish holiday parties and themed lectures and discussions organized by a few Jewish immigrants. A number of academic studies reported that between 16 and 23 percent of the population identifies itself either as atheist or agnostic.

Although the majority of citizens use traditional Lutheran rituals to mark events such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals, most Lutherans do not regularly attend Sunday services.

The number of foreigners receiving residence permits 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 significantly increased. Foreigners make up more than half of the Roman Catholic population. The Reykjavik Catholic Church holds 1 weekly English service, and many Filipinos attend. Services are also conducted in other languages in other Catholic churches and chapels around the country. A growing number of Catholic Poles, served by three Polish priests, live in the country, working in the fishing and shipbuilding industries. The Catholic Church also employs priests from Argentina, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Slovakia. Since there are few Catholic churches outside of Reykjavik, Lutheran ministers regularly lend their churches to Catholic priests so that they can conduct Masses for members in rural areas.

The Association of Muslims in Iceland (Felag Muslima a Islandi), founded in 1997, has 352 members (out of approximately 800 to 1000 Muslims living in the country, according to the association). Muslims are mostly concentrated in the capital area (although there are a number of Kosovar Muslim refugees in the small northern town of Dalvik). Since 2002 the community has had its own house of worship, with daily prayer nights and weekly Friday prayers that attract a core group of approximately 30 individuals.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) accounted for the only significant foreign missionary activity. The U.S.-based First Baptist Church of Iceland in Keflavik, which primarily served U.S. military personnel at Naval Air Station Keflavik, was still functioning after the closure of the facility in late 2006.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 Evangelical Lutheran Church as the state church and pledges the state's support and protection. Parliament has the power to pass a law to change this article. Although Gallup polls 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. According to the State Church Bishop's Office, 9 out of 10 children are baptized in their first year, more than 90 percent of adolescents are confirmed, 75 percent are married in the church, and 99 percent are buried with church ceremonies. 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. No political parties have renewed the October 2004 parliamentary motion by the Social Democratic Alliance on constitutional amendments to include the separation of church and state. Sidmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, which has approximately 200 members, strongly supports legislation to separate church and state. An October 2005 Gallup poll found two-thirds of the general population, led by men, capital-area residents, and younger, wealthier, better educated people, in favor of separation.

The state directly pays the salaries of the 140 ministers in the state church, and these ministers are considered public servants under the Ministry of Judicial and Ecclesiastical Affairs. These ministers counsel persons of all faiths and offer ecumenical services for marriages and funerals. In March 2007 the Parliament passed a bill amending the law on the state church, under which the Government is supposed to relinquish vicarages—both land and residences—to the state church for ownership. This will require increased annual funding for the state church to cover maintenance expenses. The new law also states that the Lutheran Bishop of Iceland shall appoint ministers, a power previously granted to the Minister of Justice 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. State radio broadcasts worship services every Sunday morning and daily devotions morning and night, contributing to state Lutheran domination of religion-oriented broadcasting.

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 of approximately $135 (ISK 9,468) a year. Individuals may direct their church tax payments to any of the religious groups officially registered and recognized by the state. For persons who are not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belong to one that is not registered, the tax payment goes to the University of Iceland, a secular institution. Atheists have objected to having their fee go to the university, asserting that this is inconsistent with the constitutional right of freedom of association.

During the period covered by this report, the Government gave the state church approximately $67.2 million (ISK 4.7 billion). Of that amount, the church tax funded $26.2 million (ISK 1.8 billion), the cemetery tax $11.2 million (ISK 787.3 million), and general revenues $29.7 million (ISK 2.08 billion). The state church operates all cemeteries, and the money 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 $2.9 million (ISK 205 million) to the other recognized religions and $1.9 million (ISK 136 million) to the University of Iceland.

In January 2006 the Icelandic Pagan Association (Asatuarfelagith) sued the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs and the Ministry of Finance to receive funding proportional to its membership from monies currently made available only to the state church. These monies supplement the income that the national church receives from church taxes, exclusively favoring state Lutheranism in violation of article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, according to the plaintiff. In November 2006 the Reykjavik District Court ruled in favor of the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. The ruling stated that the state church has to undertake many projects by law, and therefore it is not unjust that it gets more funding from the state than other religious organizations. The Icelandic Pagan Association appealed the verdict, and the Supreme Court was expected to take up the case in September 2007.

The Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs handles applications for recognition and registration of religious organizations. The law provides for a three-member panel consisting of a theologian, a lawyer, and a social scientist to review the applications. To become registered, a religious organization must "practice a creed or religion that can be linked to the religions of humankind that have historical or cultural roots . . . be well established . . . be active and stable . . . have a core group of members who regularly practice the religion in compliance with its teachings and should pay church taxes. . . ." All registered religious organizations are required to submit an annual report to the Ministry describing the organization's operations over the past year. The law also specifies that the leader of a religious organization must be at least 25 years old and pay taxes in the country. No restrictions or requirements are placed on unregistered religious organizations, which have the same rights as other groups in society. During the reporting period, one group, The Community of Christ in Reykjavik, applied to register as a religious organization. The application was denied on grounds of the church not being sufficiently well-established. In the previous year, two organizations had their registration applications denied on similar grounds; neither group had reapplied by the end of the reporting period.

The law 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, and such changes required the requesting children's signatures. In the absence of specific instructions to the contrary, children at birth are registered as having the same religious affiliation as their mother.

By law the Government requires instruction in Christianity, ethics, and theology during the period of compulsory education; that is, ages 6 through 15. Virtually all schools are public schools. All schools are subject to Law Number 66 with respect to compulsory curriculum. However, the precise content of this instruction can vary, and some observers have claimed that religious indoctrination can take place, as 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 teach mostly about Christianity, based on the creed's historically strong influence on the country's society and culture.

In the fall of 2006 several secondary schools in the towns of Gardabaer and Alftanes started offering a state church-run pastoral care program for students. The Ethical Humanist Association Sidmennt and representatives from nonstate religious organizations publicly criticized the program's introduction in these schools, claiming that the pastoral care program contained aspects of religious indoctrination.

Those who support the program—which has also been in place in the town of Mosfellsbaer since 1999, largely without incident—state that it is merely a means for students to talk about their feelings with a minister or a deacon and note that participation in the program is not mandatory. A minority of students took advantage of the service.

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. Some observers have noted that this discourages students or their parents from requesting such exemptions and may isolate students who seek exemptions or put them at risk of bullying in schools.

In December 2006 the Ministry of Education published a new curriculum for Christianity, ethics, and religious studies in primary schools. The curriculum suggested a more multicultural and intellectual approach to religious education and a greater emphasis on teaching a variety of beliefs. The curriculum was scheduled to come into effect on August 1, 2007. In secondary schools, theology would continue to be taught under the rubric of "community studies" along with sociology, philosophy, and history.

The Ministry of Education took no direct action relating to several problematic textbooks at the secondary school level. In the 2005–06 school year, some secondary schools adopted a new locally-published textbook on world religions. At the time of the book's introduction, minority religious organizations, while praising the book's comprehensive coverage, criticized inaccuracies in its discussion of non-Christian faiths and for describing atheism as a religion. Observers also criticized a secondary school history textbook for a number of errors regarding Islam. Under national law and Ministry of Education policy, secondary schools are allowed to choose which textbooks they will use, and there is little central authority to limit the use of particular books. During the reporting period, there were no new complaints voiced about these or other instructional texts.

The Government does not actively promote interfaith understanding. The Government does not sponsor programs or official church-government councils to coordinate interfaith dialogue, but many church groups sponsor meetings between the leaders of various religious organizations. A Japanese-born minister of the state church has been designated to serve the immigrant community and help recent arrivals of all faiths integrate into society. Holocaust education is not a required element of the national school program, but the subject is taught in most elementary and secondary schools as part of a mandatory history curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

A 2000 application for land to build a mosque continued to languish in Reykjavik's planning commission. In previous years the city cited competing claims for the land in question and expressed concern that tensions could arise if Muslims and Orthodox Christians were to erect adjacent facilities, as they had been looking at the same site. While in 2005 and prior years there were acknowledged tensions, occasionally leading to arguments between Reykjavik's small Muslim Kosovar and Orthodox Serb communities, religious leaders told authorities they had no qualms about worshipping in close proximity. Some observers continued to express concern that prejudice was behind the delay in approval of mosque construction, particularly given that other group's applications for similar plots made swifter progress during that time. In late November 2006 the city stated that the application was still under review.

In November, 2006, after a bureaucratic process spanning several years, the Reykjavik City Executive Board signed a statement of intent granting the Russian Orthodox Church a plot of land on which to build a house of worship. The church found the delays frustrating, and some observers have noted that the statement of intent falls short of full authorization to build a house of worship. The statement of intent was contingent on approval of a detailed land use plan.

In November, 2006, the Reykjavik City Executive Board signed a declaration of intent to award a plot of land to the Pagan Society of Iceland to build a place of worship. In this case, the allocation was independent of any other rezoning needs, and the Pagan Society hoped to begin construction during the summer of 2007.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were no reports of physical violence against Jews. Harassment of the country's tiny Jewish community was infrequent and not organized.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. If members of religious minorities face discrimination, it is indirect in nature, taking the form of prejudice and lack of interfaith or intercultural understanding. The country has a small, close-knit, homogenous society that closely guards its culture and is not accustomed to accommodating outsiders. Although most citizens are not active members of the state church, Lutheranism remains an important part of the country's cultural identity.

In November and December 2006, an anonymous 14-page letter featuring inflammatory anti-Muslim language and illustrations was sent to a number of citizens, including many politicians. Some of those who received the letter, although not Muslim, stated that they intended to file charges under the country's religious defamation law. A police investigation regarding the origin of the letter was inconclusive, and no charges were filed by the end of the reporting period.

Muslims in the country, seconded by independent observers, expressed concern that Omega, a Christian television station, broadcast distorted, negative coverage of Muslims and Islam. The station's broadcast area included approximately 75 percent of the country's population.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of isolated incidents involving inebriated individuals verbally harassing veiled Muslim women on the streets of Reykjavik. In May 2005 the national church for the first time organized an interfaith meeting of the leaders of major registered religious groups (defined as those with 150 or more members). In November 2006 the attendees established a permanent Forum for Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation that would foster dialogue and strengthen links between religious groups and life-stance organizations. The forum is open to all religious organizations that are registered with the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs.

SECTION IV. U.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 on religious freedom issues with the leaders of various religious groups and nongovernmental organizations.

IRELAND

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 27,136 square miles and a population of 4,239,800. The country is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. According to official Government statistics based on the 2006 census, the religious affiliation of the population is 86.8 percent Catholic (3,681,446), 2.9 percent Church of Ireland (125,585), 0.76 percent Muslim (32,539), 0.68 percent unspecified Christian (29,206), 0.55 percent Presbyterian (23,546), 0.49 percent Orthodox (20,798), 0.28 percent Methodist (12,160), less than 0.1 percent Jewish (1,930), and 6 percent unaffiliated (25,640).

The number of immigrants increased during the year; Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continued to grow, especially in Dublin. The 2006 census reported a 69.9 percent increase in the Muslim population since the 2002 census and a 99.3 percent increase in the Orthodox Christian population during the same period. Immigrants and noncitizens encountered few difficulties in practicing their religious beliefs.

According to 2005 figures released by the Catholic Communications Office (CCO), approximately 60 percent of Catholics (including those in Northern Ireland) attended Mass once a week and 5 percent attended Mass once a day. The CCO reported that there was a noticeable increase in attendance during Christmas and Easter holidays and around the time of the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005. A similar survey conducted in 2005 by the Evangelical Alliance Ireland (EAI) estimated that up to 30,000 evangelicals (comprising Baptists, members of Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, and charismatics) attended services each week.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 is no discrimination against nontraditional religious groups. There is no legal requirement that religious groups or organizations register with the Government, nor is there any formal mechanism for Government recognition of a religion or religious group.

The Employment Equality Act prohibits discrimination in employment on nine grounds, including religion. The Equality Authority works toward continued progress in the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality in employment. The Equal Status Act prohibits discrimination outside of employment (such as in education or provision of goods) on the same grounds cited in the Employment Equality Act.

While Catholicism is the dominant religion, it is not favored officially or in practice. Because of the country's history and tradition as a predominantly Catholic country and society, the majority of those in political office are Catholic, and some Catholic holy days are also national holidays.

The following Roman Catholic holy days are national holidays: St. Patrick's Day (the country's national day), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day. National religious holidays do not have an evident negative effect on other religious groups.

The Government permits but does not require religious instruction in public schools. Most primary and secondary schools are denominational, and their boards of management are governed partially by trustees within the Catholic Church or, in some cases, the Church of Ireland. Under the terms of the Constitution, the Department of Education must and does provide equal funding to schools of different religious denominations, including Islamic and Jewish schools. Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

In 2003 the Equality Authority published a booklet stating 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 the maintenance of the "ethos" of the school (for example, 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 and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were isolated reports of anti-Semitism during the year. On January 12, 2007, a man previously convicted of acts of vandalism against Jewish establish-

ments in Dublin was convicted of sending offensive e-mails to Jewish community individuals. He received a 6-month suspended sentence contingent on his continued psychiatric treatment. On September 22, 2006, two swastikas and an expletive were painted on the gates and wall of a college. The police were investigating at the end of the reporting period.

On August 11, 2006, a pair of children's shoes with the word "Qana" (a reference to the conflict involving Israeli and Hezbollah) written in red ink was found outside the synagogue in Cork.

On July 20, 2006, unknown persons painted anti-Semitic graffiti on the exterior wall of an office building during the conflict involving Israel and Hezbollah. The police promptly removed the graffiti but never identified those responsible for it. The Israeli Embassy in Dublin received anti-Semitic and anti-Israel phone calls in July. A rabbi's office in Dublin also received several phone calls in July 2006 that expressed outrage at Israel's actions during the conflict with Lebanon.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On February 26, 2007, the Prime Minister's office hosted an interfaith reception to launch the Structured Dialogue with Churches, Faith Communities, and Non-Confessional Bodies, the Government's religious outreach program. Historically, religious bodies within the country were responsible for many of the community services that the Government is now providing (education, hospitals, financial aid, etc.). The first goal of the religious outreach program is to work with religious organizations that are no longer able to provide community services to transfer these responsibilities to the Government. The second goal is to open lines of communication between the newer religious communities and the Government, ensuring that these communities are given equal access to Government services. The program included individual meetings with heads of the different religious orders in the country, as well as Government-hosted interfaith conferences. Since February 2007 the Prime Minister has met separately with the heads of the Church of Ireland, the Catholic Church, and the Jewish community. Also, in November 2006, the Prime Minister met with Muslim community leaders to celebrate the end of Ramadan, and the President attended an Eid al Fitr dinner at Dublin's prominent Sunni mosque. The Government's willingness to accept and engage the newer religious communities may contribute to a general sense of acceptance among immigrants. For example, in December 2006, a public opinion poll of Muslims living in the country reported that 77 percent said they felt accepted by society and 73 percent said they felt fully integrated into society. Also, by recognizing the importance of religion in the country, the population generally does not view the Government as being in conflict or competition with religious institutions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were limited reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Because religion, ethnicity, race, social class, and political affiliation are often inextricably linked, it is often difficult to attribute any single motive for a particular discriminatory event. Nevertheless, the events described in this section contributed to the social context within which discrimination took place, which resulted in cases of social intolerance and acts that restricted religious freedom. During the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in the summer of 2006, articles appeared in the press and on the Internet discussing the connection between anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli speech (see Anti-Semitism).

On March 28, 2007, the country's state-sponsored academy of creative arts, Aosdana, voted to end cooperation with Israeli state-sponsored cultural events and institutions in response to the then-current situation between Israel and the occupied territories. The motion was defeated in the organization's national assembly.

On January 14, 2007, the press carried stories about tensions in the Dublin Muslim community regarding an imam who was no longer welcome in mainstream mosques in Dublin, which he claimed to be under the sway of Muslim extremists. He claimed that Islamic extremists threatened his life.

On September 16, 2006, 61 of the country's academics published a letter in *The Irish Times* and called on the European Union (EU) to boycott Israeli universities due to the current situation in the occupied territories. The EU responded by calling for academic freedom and opposing the boycott. Some printed accounts reported the boycott as a form of anti-Semitism.

In late August 2006, a press interview reported on tensions in the country's Muslim community brought on by Welsh authorities' arresting and releasing without charge two Algerian-born citizens of the country suspected of plotting terrorism. An

interview with two Islamic converts illustrated instances of verbal abuse directed towards the Muslim 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 continued its engagement program aimed at fostering greater understanding of political, social, cultural, and religious views prevalent among Muslims in the country. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met regularly with Muslims and participated in several events hosted by both Embassy staff and Muslim contacts. Embassy officials also met with the members of the Jewish community, the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and prominent leaders from both Catholic and Protestant religious groups to discuss ways of promoting religious freedom and to survey the level of religious freedom experienced by the various religious groups. The Embassy's third annual interfaith Thanksgiving reception facilitated dialogue and understanding of religious freedom among governmental and nongovernmental organizations as well as among religious and community leaders; the reception also assisted Government outreach to minority groups.

ITALY

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 by the Government 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 religious groups.

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. There were reports of societal anti-Semitism, especially graffiti, following the 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, as well as reports of discrimination and harassment of Muslims; nevertheless, prominent religious and Government officials continued to encourage mutual respect for religious differences.

The Catholic Church's influential role in society led to controversy when church teachings appeared to influence Catholic legislators on matters of public policy. Some anti-immigrant sentiment has accompanied increasing immigration. For the country's many Muslim immigrants, religion has served as an additional factor differentiating them from native-born citizens.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 116,347 square miles and a population of 58.7 million. An estimated 87 percent of native-born citizens are nominally Catholic, but only 20 percent regularly participate in worship services. Non-Catholic Christian groups, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Baha'i Faith, and Buddhists constitute less than 5 percent of the population. Significant Christian communities include Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Assembly of God, the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and other small Protestant groups. 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. The Ministry of the Interior reports that there are 258 places of Muslim worship (mainly "garage" mosques) concentrated in Lombardy, Veneto, Lazio, Emilia Romagna, and Tuscany. Latest estimates number the Jewish community at 30,000, maintaining synagogues in 21 cities. The most recent available data indicates that approximately 14 percent of the population identifies itself as either atheist or agnostic.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government provides funds for the construction of places of worship, public land for their construction, and helps to preserve and maintain historic places of worship that shelter much of the country's artistic and cultural heritage.

Under the 1984 revision of the Concordat with the Catholic Church, the state is secular but maintains 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. 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.

Groups with an intesa include the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, Adventists, Assembly of God, Jews, Baptists, and Lutherans. On April 4, 2007, the Government signed accords with the Buddhist Union, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, the Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate, and the Hindus. On the same date, the Government also amended previous intese with the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches and the Adventists. The April 2007 new and amended intese have been submitted to Parliament for ratification, which is expected by the end of the year. Negotiations have been suspended with the Soka Gakkai, or Japanese Buddhists, pending their reorganization. Divisions among the country's Muslim organizations, as well as the existence of 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. Such courses are 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 may now be either lay or religious, and their instruction is intended to include material relevant to non-Catholic religious groups. Problems may arise in small communities where information about other religious groups and the number of non-Catholics 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.

Muslim women are free to wear the veil in public offices and schools; however, the 2005 antiterrorism decree doubled existing penalties for persons convicted of wearing attire such as a burqa (or a crash helmet) in order to hide their identity. Penalties were increased to 2 years in jail and fines increased to $2,620 (€2,000) up from $1,310 (€1,000). People are also forbidden to hide their identities under a seldom used 1931 law.

The "Inter-Ministerial Commission to Combat Anti-Semitism" is tasked with ensuring strong, uniform responses to any anti-Semitic acts by the police and local/Federal Government officials.

Missionaries or religious workers 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; however, some Muslim groups reported being unable to construct mosques for worship.

Plans are underway for an enlarged Islamic Center in Milan, although complications with building permits have continued to delay construction, to the frustration of the local Muslim community. Milan Deputy Mayor Riccardo De Corato was reported as saying in March 2007 that "a new mosque cannot be authorized."

On May 17, 2006, an administrative tribunal asked the Constitutional Court to consider the constitutionality of a law used to deport a Turin imam in 2005. At the end of the reporting period, the court had not issued its decision.

The continuing presence of Catholic symbols, such as crucifixes, in courtrooms, schools, and other public buildings, has drawn criticism and led to a number of lawsuits. On February 7, 2007, Justice Minister Mastella said that the crucifix was a symbol of traditional Italian culture and values and therefore could be displayed in

public buildings. On January 30, 2007, a judge was sent to trial accused of failing to perform his duties after he refused to preside in a courtroom where a crucifix was displayed; he accused the Minister of Justice of religious prejudice for not allowing the display of a menorah. On July 5, 2006, a Muslim who threw a crucifix out of a window in his mother's room at a public hospital was acquitted because in 2005 the Constitutional Court, in a separate case, had declared the law criminalizing such an act to be unconstitutional as it pertained to only one faith. On February 15, 2006, the Council of State, the national appeals court for administrative cases, rejected a request made by a mother to remove crucifixes from her children's classrooms; the court determined that the presence of religious symbols in public buildings is not discriminatory as they epitomize high civil values.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were no reports of violent anti-Semitic attacks in the period covered by this report, but public opinion surveys indicated that anti-Semitism was growing in the country.

A survey commissioned by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in 2007 found that 48 percent of Italians thought that "Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Italy." Forty-two percent thought that "Jews have too much power in the business world." Ninety-two percent of those interviewed expressed strong support for active Government intervention to fight anti-Semitism; however, 46 percent felt that "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust." The survey also showed that education and age were strongly correlated with anti-Semitic feelings, as those over age 65 and those who did not attend school past age 16 were more likely to harbor anti-Semitic feelings.

Government leaders routinely acknowledge and pay tribute to Jews victimized by the country's 1938 racial laws. In addition, the reconstitution of the Fascist party or openly advocating or defending Fascist ideology and its political and historical legacy, is illegal.

On June 15, 2007, after a temporary loosening of the house-arrest restrictions placed upon Captain Erich Priebke, a Nazi war criminal who participated in the massacre of 335 civilians in 1944, vandals signed graffiti with a swastika that welcomed him back to Rome. Swastika graffiti appeared in some cities after soccer matches. On July 11, 2006, neo-Nazis celebrating the country's World Cup victory in the Jewish quarter of Rome vandalized walls, doors, and vehicles with swastikas and other anti-Semitic graffiti. The Prime Minister and other politicians strongly condemned the incidents as "ignoble gestures of hate and intolerance."

During the 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, Jewish citizens were sometimes held collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel. For example, the ADL reported that on July 28, 2006, in Livorno, vandals wrote graffiti roughly translating to "Israel is an evil state" on the walls of Jewish-owned businesses. The ADL also reported that on August 1, 2006, vandals damaged and painted swastikas on 20 shops in Rome. Fliers found at the shops, signed by the Armed Revolutionary Fascists, a neo-Fascist group, denounced "the Zionist economy" and included pro-Hezbollah statements. Also in August the National Secretary of the Union of Islamic Communities in Italy (UCOII) placed an advertisement in local newspapers comparing the alleged massacres committed by the Israeli armed forces in Lebanon to the massacres committed by the Nazis. Politicians, Government officials, and the Minister of the Interior's Muslim advisory board, the Islamic Consulta, (except for the UCOII member) condemned the statement.

There were no arrests in the May 16, 2006, vandalizing of 40 Jewish graves (of approximately 6,000) in Milan. Vandals knocked over and broke tombstones, but there were no signs of anti-Semitic slogans or Nazi symbols. Leaders of both the center-left and center-right condemned the attack; Milan's Chief Rabbi called the incident serious and without precedent. The police opened an investigation and speculated in the press that the vandals might have been drunken revelers. The case was not resolved by the end of the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

National, regional, and local authorities organize annual educational initiatives and other events to support National Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, 2007, such as the visit to Auschwitz of a group of 600 students accompanied by the Minister of Education and the Chief Rabbi of Rome.

On April 23, 2007, the Minister of the Interior presented to the 16-member Islamic Consultative Council, a proposed charter of shared values of citizenship and integration that would apply to all immigrants. At the end of the reporting period the approval process of the charter remained unfinished.

On February 8, 2007, the municipality of Colle Val d'Elsa approved the request of the Muslim community to expand a mosque near Florence despite continued criticism by the Northern League and others, who vocally opposed the plan.

In 2006 the Office to Combat Racial and Ethnic Discrimination received more than 10,000 phone calls. A total of 351 formal complaints were lodged, 218 of which were ultimately determined to be legitimate cases of discrimination. The office administers a hotline to receive complaints and a public relations effort to discourage ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Religious and Government officials continued to encourage mutual respect for religious differences.

While Catholicism is no longer the state religion, its role as the dominant religion occasionally leads to claims of conflict of interest with the state or attempts at governmental imposition of Catholic beliefs on non-Catholics. For example, on May 12, 2007, some Catholic groups organized demonstrations to protest proposed legislation that dealt with civil unions for same-sex couples that allowed them to be eligible for insurance, pension, and inheritance benefits, but not for recognition as married. Interior Minister Amato publicly lamented that a policy debate was denigrating into rival street protests. The protests were in response to a March 28, 2007, condemnation of the legislation from the Italian Bishops' Conference which said the legislation undermined family values and urged Catholic parliamentarians to vote against it.

On November 20, 2006, in Ancona, a barman refused to serve an Italian customer of African origin asserting that he was free not to work for Muslims. The police charged and fined him for not serving all customers without discrimination.

On August 12, 2006, the body of a Muslim girl was found in the backyard of her parents' house. She was the victim of an "honor killing" by her Pakistani father in northern Italy for behavior he deemed unacceptable; the father was arrested and is awaiting trial.

During the 2006 election campaign, some Catholic politicians and community leaders contributed to popular reaction by emphasizing the perceived threat posed by immigrants to the country's "national identity."

Both elected and nonelected members of the Northern League political party, formerly a minority member of the governing coalition and currently represented in the Parliament, have asserted that practices and traditions 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.

On March 13, 2006, Rome's Chief Rabbi paid a first-ever visit to Rome's main mosque; a reciprocal visit was discussed but did not take place by 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.

The Mission implemented a robust program of Muslim outreach, including meetings with local Muslim communities, cultural music events, an active International Visitor Program for Muslims, and a successful conference on Muslim immigration and integration. Many of these events are intended to bring together native-born citizens and Muslims, often immigrants, in the hopes of building cross-cultural understanding and religious and ethnic tolerance.

The Embassy monitored discrimination, maintaining contact with religious groups, including Jewish groups, and met with representatives of the Baha'i and other faiths.

LATVIA

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

There was no change in the status of religious freedom by the Government 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 religious groups.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, lingering suspicions remained toward newer, "nontraditional" religious groups.

The U.S. 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 25,000 square miles and a population of 2.2 million. The largest religious groups, their percentage of the population, and number of adherents are: Roman Catholicism (22 percent—approximately 500,000 persons), Lutheranism (20 percent—450,000), and Orthodox Christianity (15 percent—350,000). Sizeable religious minorities include Baptists, Pentecostals, and evangelical Protestant groups. The once large Jewish community was virtually destroyed in the Holocaust during the 1941–44 German occupation. In 2006, according to official sources, 9,743 persons identified themselves as ethnically Jewish.

As of May 2007 the Board of Religious Affairs had registered 1,174 congregations. These included Lutheran congregations (304), Roman Catholic (251), Orthodox Christian (119), Baptist (94), Old Believer Orthodox (69), Seventh-day Adventist (52), Muslim (15), Jehovah's Witnesses (14), Methodist (13), Jewish (13), Hare Krishna (11), Buddhist (4), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4), and 211 other congregations.

Interest in religion increased markedly following the restoration of independence; however, a large percentage of adherents do not regularly practice their faith. In 2006 religious groups provided the following estimates of membership in congregations to the Justice Ministry: Roman Catholics (500,000), Lutherans (450,000), Orthodox Christians (350,000), Baptists (7,240), Seventh-day Adventists (4,006), Old Believer Orthodox (2,843), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (926), Methodists (876), Muslims (380), Jews (305), Jehovah's Witnesses (178), Hare Krishnas (118), and Buddhists (75). Although no precise statistics exist, it is widely acknowledged that a significant portion of the population is atheist. Orthodox Christians, many of whom are Russian-speaking, noncitizen 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 respected this right in practice. However, bureaucratic problems persisted for some minority religious groups. There is no state religion; however, the Government distinguishes between "traditional"—Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Old Believers, Baptists, and Jewish—and "new" religious groups. In practice this has resulted in increased bureaucratic regulations and requirements for "new" religious groups not applicable to "traditional" ones.

Jews are considered to be members of an ethnic group and can be listed as such in passports, rather than as Latvian or Russian. Prior to 2002, regardless of the bearer's wishes, all passports listed the bearer's ethnicity on the front bio-page as Latvian, Russian, or Jewish. In 2002 new passports were introduced that indicate ethnicity only when requested by the bearer. If the bearer requests that ethnicity be listed, it is listed on the backside of the bio-page.

Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter Monday are national holidays. For several years the Orthodox Church has been seeking official recognition of Orthodox Christmas, but the Government had not adopted this proposal by the end of the reporting period.

The Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Orthodox churches each have their own seminary. The University of Latvia's theological faculty is nondenominational.

There are two councils that comment on religious issues for the Government: the New Religions Consultative Council (NRCC) and the Ecclesiastical Council (EC). The NRCC consists of representatives of municipal institutions, law enforcement bodies, as well as persons representing the fields of education, culture, and social affairs. It meets on an ad hoc basis and offers opinions on specific issues, but it does not have decision-making authority. It has not published any information or warnings concerning "cults."

The Ecclesiastical Council is an advisory body organized in 2002 and chaired by the sitting Prime Minister. It includes representatives from major religious groups: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Orthodox, Jewish, Adventist, Methodist, and Old Believers. The Ecclesiastical Council met during the reporting period to discuss five new draft laws on "traditional" confessions. The draft laws outline which religious groups are considered "traditional" (those that were present during the country's first period of independence), and further defines the relationship between the specific church and the state. Parliament was considering the five draft laws during the reporting period. Under current law traditional religious groups enjoy certain rights and privileges that nontraditional ones do not. It was not clear how the relationship between church and state would be defined and/or changed if the proposed laws were passed.

Although the Government does not require the registration of religious groups, the 1995 Law on Religious Organizations accords religious organizations certain rights and privileges if they register, such as status as a separate legal entity for owning property or financial transactions, as well as tax benefits for donors. Registration also eases the rules for public gatherings.

According to the 1995 law, any 20 citizens or other persons over the age of 18 who have been recorded in the population register may apply to register a church. Asylum seekers, foreign staff of diplomatic missions, and those in the country temporarily in a special status may not. Congregations that do not belong to a registered church association must reregister each year for 10 years. Ten or more congregations of the same denomination and with permanent registration status may form a religious association. Only churches with religious association status may establish theological schools or monasteries. The decision to register a church is made by the Board of Religious Affairs, a semiautonomous body within the Ministry of Justice. The director of the Board of Religious Affairs reports directly to the Minister of Justice. According to board officials, the board approves most registration applications once proper documents are submitted. The Latvian National Human Rights Office proposed to abolish the religious association membership requirement and reduce the new congregation registration requirement to 3 years. By the end of the reporting period, Parliament had not acted on this recommendation, and no legislation had been introduced.

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. During the reporting period, the Government did not register or receive requests to register any offshoots of established religious groups. During the reporting period, 10 nonassociated Old Believer groups registered with the board.

In 2005 the Board of Religious Affairs again proposed amendments to the Law on Religious Organizations that would abolish restrictions on single association registration. However, neither the Ecclesiastical Council nor the Government had acted on this recommendation by the end of the reporting period.

Visa regulations require foreign religious workers to present either an ordination certificate or evidence of religious education that corresponds to a local bachelor's degree in theology, and letters of invitation. The process remained cumbersome, although the Government generally was cooperative in helping resolve difficult visa cases in favor of missionaries.

The law stipulates that foreign missionaries may hold meetings and proselytize only if invited by domestic religious organizations to conduct such activities. Foreign religious denominations criticized this provision.

The Law on Religious Organizations stipulates that only representatives of "traditional" Christian churches (i.e., Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox Christian, Old Believer, and Baptist Churches) may teach religion to public school students who volunteer to take the classes. The Government provides funds for this education. Students at state-supported national minority schools also may receive education on a voluntary basis on the religion "characteristic of the national minority." Other denominations and religious groups that do not have their own state-supported minority schools, such as the Jewish community, may provide religious education only in private schools.

Property restitution had been substantially completed, although most religious groups, including the Lutheran, Orthodox Christian, and Jewish communities, continued to wait for the return of some properties. The status of these remaining properties was the subject of complicated legal and bureaucratic processes concerning ambiguous ownership, competing claims, and the destruction of the Jewish communities to which properties belonged before World War II. The Jewish community expressed concern about the terms under which some properties were restored. The

Office of the Prime Minister established a working group to address restitution-related concerns of the country's religious communities.

In 2006 a law was proposed that would provide compensation for approximately 200 communal and heirless private properties to the Jewish community. The proposal would create a centralized list of all the contested properties and the compensation requested for each item. By prenegotiating the list of properties with the Government, the Jewish community hoped to expedite the legislative process. While the cabinet approved the draft legislation on November 6, 2006, it failed on its first reading in Parliament on November 23, 2006, by a vote of 12 for, 6 against, and 67 abstentions. The Government can resubmit the legislation to Parliament but had not done so by the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

In June 2007 part of a memorial under construction and dedicated to Janis Lipke, who saved 55 Jews from the Riga ghetto during the Nazi occupation, was stolen from a graveyard in Riga. However, there was no clear evidence that this was an anti-Semitic incident, since the items may have been stolen for their cash value. Of a total of 14 hate crime cases initiated in 2006, none was committed against Jews. Of a total of 13 hate crime cases investigated by the police in 2005, 2 were hate speech cases on the Internet against Jews.

The local Jewish community objected to a private showing in January 2007 of a play about the Beilis trial (which involved the "blood libel" allegation) that occurred in early 20th-century Russia. The performance took place at the Latvian National Theater (on a small stage that was available for public rental), and the local Jewish community stated that the work is clearly anti-Semitic and that its showing at the theater was a cause for concern.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Ecumenism, however, continued to be a relatively new concept in the country, and traditional religious groups have adopted a distinctly reserved attitude toward the concept. Although Government officials encouraged a broader understanding and acceptance of newer religious groups, many citizens continued to doubt the validity of such groups.

The Latvian Historical Commission, under the sponsorship of President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, continued to promote Holocaust awareness throughout society. A monument to Janis Lipke was unveiled on July 4, 2007. In June 2004 the country was admitted as a permanent member of the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. In July 2006 the country held its first Holocaust Remembrance conference, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and presided over by the President. Participants included citizens and delegates from the United States, and Western, Central, and Eastern Europe.

Many Government leaders—the President in particular—reacted to a perceived increase in public anti-Semitism by speaking out against all forms of xenophobia and appearing prominently at Holocaust-related commemoration events. The Government actively discouraged anti-Semitism, although anti-Semitic sentiments persisted in some segments of society, manifested in occasional public comments and resistance to laws and memorials designed to foster Holocaust remembrance. Books and other publications appearing in the country that address the World War II period generally dwelt on the effects of the Soviet and Nazi occupations on the nation and on ethnic Latvians, sometimes at the expense of comment on the Holocaust or some citizens' role in it.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy worked to support the principle of religious freedom by engaging in regular exchanges with the President, the Prime Minister, and appropriate Government bodies, including the Office of Religious Affairs, human rights nongovernmental organizations, and representatives of various religious confessions, including missionaries. The Embassy also held regular

discussions with local immigration authorities and section meetings with the Department of Religious Affairs. Embassy officials maintained an open and productive dialogue with the Government's Director of the Board of Religious Affairs.

The Embassy actively supported the Latvian Historical Commission. It funded the travel of scholars to the United States for education on ethnic and religious tolerance, and of U.S. experts to the country for historical commission activities. In addition the Embassy worked with the Government to develop a Holocaust education curriculum for all students in grades 9 through 12. The Embassy funded the teacher training in curriculum development, production and publication of a Holocaust education curriculum, and teacher preparation to teach Holocaust history and awareness. The completed Holocaust curriculum was published in late spring 2005 and, following teacher training throughout the summer, was implemented in the 2005–06 school year in some history and social studies classes.

The Embassy, through a Democracy Commission Grant, also assisted with the production and publication of the book *Jewish Cemeteries in Latvia*, released in spring 2006.

LIECHTENSTEIN

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 61.7 square miles and, at the end of 2006, a population of 35,200. According to the 2000 census count, membership in religious denominations was as follows: 78.4 percent Roman Catholic, 8.3 percent Protestant, 4.8 percent Muslim, 1.1 percent Christian Orthodox, 0.1 percent Jewish, 0.4 percent other religions, and 2.8 percent professed no formal creed. For 4.1 percent of residents, authorities had no indication of their religious affiliation. The Government discontinued gathering intermittent statistics on religious affiliation in 2002, indicating a desire to protect personal data.

The Muslim community has grown over the last two decades as a result of an influx of migrants primarily from Turkey and the Western Balkans (Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina), many of whom resettled from other Western European countries. According to official census statistics, the Muslim population increased from 689 in 1990 to 1,593 in 2000.

There are few foreign missionary groups in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Criminal Code prohibits any form of discrimination or debasement of any religion or any of its adherents. The Constitution makes the Roman Catholic Church the established church of the country, and as such it enjoys the full protection of the state.

Funding for religious institutions 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. Catholic and Protestant churches receive regular annual contributions from the Government in proportion to membership size as determined in the census count of 2000; smaller religious groups are eligible to apply for grants for associations of foreigners or specific projects. For the year 2007 the national Government budgeted $240,000 (300,000 Swiss francs) to the Catholic Church and $40,000 (50,000 Swiss francs) to the Protestant churches. Since 2006 the Government has also contributed $20,000

(25,000 Swiss francs) per year to the Muslim community. The Catholic Church receives additional sums from the 11 municipalities that pay for the maintenance of church buildings and the salaries of parish priests. The Protestant churches receive approximately $148,000 (185,000 Swiss francs) annually from the municipalities. All religious groups enjoy tax-exempt status.

Both the Council of Europe's (COE) Commissioner for Human Rights and the U.N. Human Rights Committee in the past criticized the fact that standing policy favored the Catholic Church over other religious communities in the distribution of state subsidies and urged the Government to review its policies to ensure an equitable distribution of these funds.

The relationship between the state and the Catholic Church was being redefined. In November 2006 and May 2007 the Government hosted two more sessions of the working group seeking consensus on legislative reform on this issue. On June 21, 2007, Prime Minister Otmar Hasler told Parliament that a provisional constitutional amendment for a new regulation of relations between the state and the religious communities had been drafted; it would be incumbent upon the municipalities to enter into talks with the Catholic Church on the separation of church and state at the county level. During the reporting period, both Prince Hans-Adam II and Hereditary Prince Alois publicly took a stance in favor of the separation of church and state.

To receive a religious-worker visa, an applicant must demonstrate that the host organization is important for the entire country. An applicant must have completed theological studies and be accredited with an acknowledged religious group. Visa requests for religious workers were normally not denied and were processed in the same manner as requests from other individuals or workers.

The Government grants the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam, plus one short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The Government follows a policy of routinely granting visas to the imams in exchange for the agreement of both the Turkish Association and the Muslim community to prevent religious diatribes by the imams or the spread of religious extremism.

Religious education is part of the curriculum at public schools. At the secondary school level, parents and pupils choose between traditional confessional religious education and the nonconfessional subject "Religion and Culture." Since its introduction in 2003, more than 85 percent of Catholic pupils have chosen the new subject, with the remainder following traditional confessional classes held by the Catholic Church. Representatives of the Protestant community have complained that the optional subject "Religion and Culture" de facto eliminated classes in Protestant doctrine because it made it virtually impossible for the minority community to meet the quorum of four pupils to hold confessional classes as part of the regular curriculum. As an alternative, Protestant churches offer religious education classes outside of regular school hours with financial support from the Government.

At the primary school level, a recent agreement between the Catholic Church and the local and national governments retained the compulsory nature of confessional religious education. The agreement granted the Catholic Church greater autonomy in setting the curriculum and provided for only a complementary supervisory role of the local municipalities. All municipalities, except for Balzers, Triesen, and Planken, which decided to retain the old model of religious education with stronger Government supervision, have implemented the agreement.

At the end of February 2007, the Government approved a project to introduce Muslim religious education classes in public primary schools. The Government set several criteria, namely that instructors have received both pedagogical and topical training and that classes are to be held in German. The Government also insisted that the curriculum be reviewed by experts and that instruction be supervised by the Department of Education. The project was initially scheduled to run for 1 year and to be evaluated in the spring of 2008. It would be the first time that Muslim religious education classes are offered in primary schools. Previously Muslim parents could only send their children to a mosque for religious instruction.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

In a newspaper interview published February 14, 2007, Prince Hans-Adam II declared that it was very important to sustain the dialogue between religions and to promote religious freedom. The Prince also declared himself in favor of establishing Muslim cemeteries in the country.

On January 29, 2007, the Government held for the second time a special memorial hour to commemorate the Holocaust. The Government called on the population to commemorate the historic date and presented the Day of Remembrance as part of the Government's efforts to fight racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. Since 2003 secondary schools have held discussion forums on the Holocaust on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance.

Since 2004 the Government has maintained a working group for the better integration of members of the Muslim community into society, consisting of representatives of the Muslim community and Government officials who deal with Islam as part of their duties. The working group's objectives are to counter mutual prejudices and promote respect and tolerance on the basis of dialogue and mutual understanding. In a practice begun at the working group's suggestion, the Government continues to issue a short-term residency permit for one additional imam during Ramadan and beginning in 2006 initiated a regular annual contribution of $20,000 (25,000 Swiss francs) to the Muslim community. Discussions of the working group also led, in 2006, to the establishment of a subworking group preparing the Government project to introduce Muslim religious education in public primary schools.

The Government's Equal Opportunity Office is charged with handling complaints of religious discrimination, but the office has not been contacted in the recent past concerning a case of discrimination based on religious belief. The Government has also established an interdepartmental Working Group against Racism, anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia whose purpose is to prevent racist and xenophobic attitudes through awareness raising and the promotion of mutual understanding and respect. The working group also coordinates the Government's measures to prevent and combat anti-Semitism.

The Government supported or sponsored a variety of activities to promote the integration of immigrants and intercultural understanding, including a class on intercultural dialogue in the curriculum of the national administration's internal training program.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom, such as the February 14, 2007, newspaper interview of the Prince Hans-Adam II, advocating religious freedom and the statements of the Hereditary Prince on the separation of church and state. 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.

On June 13, 2007, unknown vandals seriously damaged a small chapel in the woods near Schaanwald in the county of Mauren. According to police reports, the vandals damaged the altar and destroyed several religious icons, and ravaged the interior of the chapel with burning matches. At the end of the reporting period, the investigation was ongoing.

On December 22, 2006, a national court sentenced a 23-year-old Turkish resident to a suspended fine of $2,900 (3,600 Swiss francs) for violating the antiracism clause of the Penal Code. The court found that he had disseminated two computer files with anti-Semitic content and transferred them onto a computer of a mosque in a nearby Swiss border town to which members of a religious association registered in the country had access.

There were no reports of physical acts against Jewish persons or property. The Jewish community in the country is too small to sustain an organizational structure of its own.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy and the Office of Foreign Affairs conduct annual discussions of religious freedom issues in preparation for this report.

LITHUANIA

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

There were some reports of vandalism of Jewish graves and monuments, displays of neo-Nazi sentiment, and anti-Semitic comments. Several media outlets published items expressing intolerance towards religious or ethnic groups. The political leadership usually criticized such statements and anti-Semitic acts when they occurred.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and tolerance and in discussions on the country's strategy for addressing its Holocaust legacy. The U.S. Embassy promoted religious freedom and tolerance through various media and public speaking events and actively denounced the few acts of religious and ethnic intolerance.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 25,174 square miles and a population of 3.38 million. Roman Catholicism remains dominant and influential. According to the 2001 census, approximately 79 percent (2,686,000) of the population considers itself Roman Catholic. As of April 2007 there were 685 registered Roman Catholic communities and associations (such as parishes, schools, and monasteries). The Eastern Orthodox Church, the second largest religious group, has approximately 140,000 members, with 52 communities located mainly along the border with Belarus.

Old Believers, Russian Orthodox practitioners who practice older rites, number 27,000 and have 62 registered communities. An estimated 20,000 Lutherans belong to 59 communities, primarily in the southwest. The Evangelical Reformed community has approximately 7,000 members in 17 communities. The 7 Sunni Muslim communities count approximately 2,700 members, while the Greek Catholic community has an estimated 300. The Jewish community numbers approximately 4,000. The majority of local Jews are secular, and only an estimated 1,200 belong to one of seven Jewish communities.

The Karaites have been in the country since 1397. Karaites speak a Turkic-based language and use the Hebrew alphabet. Some consider Karaites to be a branch of Judaism; their religion is based exclusively on the Old Testament. The Government recognizes the Karaites as a distinct ethnic group. Two houses of worship, one in Vilnius and one in nearby Trakai, serve the Karaite religious community of approximately 250 members. The Karaites' only religious leader is also their community president.

Some 0.23 percent of the population belong to what the Government refers to as "nontraditional" religious communities. The most numerous of these are the Full Gospel Word of Faith Movement, Pentecostals/Charismatics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and the New Apostolic Church. A total of 1,061 "traditional" and 179 "nontraditional" religious associations, centers, and communities have officially registered with the State Register of Legal Entities.

An estimated 9.4 percent of the population does not identify with any religious group.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 26 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. 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 Criminal Code contains three provisions to protect religious freedom. The code prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for punishment of up to 2 years' imprisonment. Interference with religious ceremonies is also punishable with imprisonment or community service. Inciting religious hatred is punishable by imprisonment of up to 3 years and legal entities can be prosecuted for violations under this article.

It is unlawful to make use of the religious teachings of churches and other religious organizations, their religious activities, and their houses of prayer for purposes that contradict the Constitution or the law. The Government may also temporarily restrict freedom of expression of religious conviction during a period of martial law or a state of emergency. The Government has never invoked these laws.

There is no state religion. However, under the 1995 Law on Religious Communities and Associations, some religious groups enjoy benefits not available to others, including Government funding, the right to teach religion in public schools, and the right to register marriages. The Law on Religious Communities and Associations enables all registered religious groups to own property for prayer houses, homes, and other uses, and permits construction of facilities necessary for their activities.

The law divides registered religious communities into state-recognized "traditional" religious communities, other state-recognized religious groups, and all other registered communities and associations. The Constitution recognizes "traditional" churches and religious organizations, as well as other churches and religious organizations, provided that they have a basis in society and their teaching and rituals do not contravene morality or the law.

Government authorities acknowledge as traditional only those religious groups that can trace their presence in the country back at least 300 years. The law enumerates nine traditional religious communities: Latin Rite Catholics (Roman Catholics), Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed Churchgoers, Orthodox Christians (Moscow Patriarchate), Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites.

"Traditional" religious communities and associations may register marriages, establish subsidiary institutions, establish joint private/public schools, provide religious instruction in public schools, and be eligible to receive Government assistance. Their highest religious leaders are eligible to apply for diplomatic passports, their clergy and theological students are exempt from military service, and they may provide military chaplains. The Ministry of Justice does not require traditional religious communities and associations to register their bylaws. Traditional religious communities do not have to pay social and health insurance for clergy and other employees, and they are not subject to a value-added tax on basic utilities.

The law stipulates that the Government may grant state recognition to "nontraditional" religious communities that have societal support and have been registered in the country for at least 25 years. Nontraditional religious communities must apply to the Ministry of Justice and provide a description of their religious teachings and a founding statement signed by no fewer than 15 members who are adult citizens. The Ministry must review the documents within 6 months and make a recommendation to Parliament for final approval.

In practice state-recognized nontraditional religions receive some privileges from the Government, but not to the extent that traditional religious groups do. The Baptists were the only state-recognized "nontraditional" religion. They are entitled to perform marriages and do not have to pay social security and health care taxes for clergy and other employees. However, the Baptists do not receive the annual subsidies, tax exemptions, or exemptions from military service granted to "traditional" communities.

The Ministry of Justice's Religious Affairs Department is responsible for processing initial registration applications, but the State Register of Legal Entities, under the national Registry Center, manages the database of registered religious communities. Religious communities can file applications at local registration centers throughout the country. Registration centers forward new applications to the Religious Affairs Department and process renewal registrations locally. New communities affiliated with traditional religious groups register for free, while nontraditional communities pay a registration fee of $41 (105 litas).

Religious communities must register to obtain official status, which is a prerequisite for opening a bank account, owning property, or acting in a legal or official capacity as a community. Unregistered communities have no legal status or state privileges. However, there were no reports that the Government prevented any such groups from worshiping or seeking new members.

While only traditional religious communities receive annual state subsidies, nontraditional groups are eligible for Government support for their cultural and social projects.

Following the restoration of the country's independence, the Government began returning religious communities' property confiscated by Nazi and Soviet occupiers. The law grants all religious communities equal opportunity to reacquire property once used for religious services and other activities. The Government successfully resolved a number of claims for restitution, mostly in the early and mid-1990s. Some claims were pending at the end of the reporting period.

No single Government agency handles all religious issues. A department in the Ministry of Justice adjudicates religious groups' requests for registration. The Prime Minister's advisor for Cultural and Jewish Affairs follows relevant issues within the Jewish community.

The Office of the Equal Opportunities (OEO) Ombudsperson is authorized to adjudicate complaints about state institutions, educational institutions, employment, and product and service sellers and producers that discriminate on the basis of religion (previously, the Office heard complaints on gender-discrimination issues only).

The Parliament Ombudsperson examines whether state authorities properly perform their duty to serve the people. The law on the Parliament Ombudsperson specifically notes religious beliefs in defining the functions of the office. Both Ombudspersons has the authority to investigate complaints, recommend changes to parliamentary committees and ministries regarding legal acts, and recommend cases to the Prosecutor General's Office for pretrial investigation if warranted.

While there is some overlap between the two bodies, the OEO Ombudsperson appears to have greater authority to hear complaints of individual acts of religious discrimination.

The Jounalist Ethics Inspectorate has the authority to investigate complaints under article 20 of the Law on Provision of Information to the Public, which bars publishing material that "instigates war, national, racial, religious, social and gender hatred." It has the authority to levy administrative fines on newspapers under administrative law or refer cases to law enforcement authorities for criminal prosecution.

In 2000 the Government and the Holy See agreed to allow the Catholic Church to provide religious support to Roman Catholic members of the military through chaplains. In 2002 the Ministry of Defense and the Catholic Church signed a regulation on chaplains' activities. During the reporting period, there were 16 Roman Catholic chaplains providing services to the military. Other traditional churches and religious groups provide similar support. The chaplaincy may ask the Ministry of Defense to provide religious services for other religious groups based on need or requests from service members. The Ministry of Defense provides material support and places of worship.

Conscientious objectors may petition for alternative military service within military structures, but there is no option for alternative nonmilitary service, despite requests by members of Jehovah's Witnesses. Persons enrolled in alternative military service receive noncombat assignments but must follow military regulations and reside on military installations.

Religious holidays include St. Mary's Celebration (January 1), Easter Monday, Assumption Day (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), and Christmas.

The Constitution establishes public educational institutions as secular. The Law on Education permits and funds public school religious instruction only in "traditional" and state-recognized religious beliefs. In practice parents can choose either religious instruction or secular ethics classes for their children. Schools decide which of the traditional religious groups will be represented in their curriculums on the basis of requests from parents for children up to age 14 (after age 14, the pupil decides). During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education and Science received no complaints about any school not providing requested religious instruction.

The number of wholly private religious schools is relatively low. There were approximately 25 schools with ties to Catholic and Jewish groups, although students of different religious groups often attended these schools. All accredited private schools (religious and nonreligious) receive funding from the Ministry of Education and Science through a voucher system based on the number of pupils; private Roman Catholic schools receive additional funds from the Government to cover operational costs. This system covers program but not capital costs of school operation. Founders generally bear responsibility for covering capital outlays; however, the Ministry provides funding for capital costs of traditional religious private schools where an international agreement to do so exists.

In 2007 public schools provided religious education to 272,912 Roman Catholics, 3,804 Russian Orthodox, 762 Evangelical Lutherans, 343 Greek Catholics, 225 Jewish students, 115 Evangelical Reformed Lutherans, 15 Old Believers, and 6 Muslims. A total of 222,233 students studied ethics.

An interministerial commission coordinates investigations of religious groups. It seeks to ensure that activities of religious groups are in line with the principles of a democratic society, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. The Minister of Justice appoints the chairperson of the commission, which also comprises representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Education, Health, Foreign Affairs, the General Prosecutor's Office, and the State Security Department. The Government

established the commission following some parliamentarians' calls for increased control of "sects."

In 2006 the commission concluded that so-called magical services (for example, as offered by psychics and astrologers) were properly regulated by law, and no new regulations were necessary.

In 2006 the commission decided to examine the issue of cemetery vandalism, which occurs regularly—usually between 7 and 10 cases per year. It is unclear if these cases are motivated by religious hatred. By the end of the reporting period, the commission had not met formally to discuss the issue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While registered "nontraditional" religious communities can act as legal entities, they do not receive regular subsidies, tax exemptions, social benefits, or exemptions from military service enjoyed by traditional communities. In April 2006 the Government allocated $1,310,000 (3,279,000 litas) to traditional religious communities for capital costs associated with houses of worship, schools, and other facilities. No other religious communities received this type of support, but funds from municipal or other government sources may be available for their use. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had allocated $3,000 (7,579 litas) of funding to communities for 2007, with additional funding likely to come later.

The state additionally funds social security and health care contributions for spiritual leaders of traditional and state-recognized religious communities. Other religious communities must pay for these benefits on behalf of their spiritual leaders.

For the 5th consecutive year, Parliament deferred granting "state-recognized religion" status to the United Methodist Church of Lithuania.

At the end of the reporting period, the applications of the Seventh-day Adventists and the Pentecostals to become state-recognized religions remained pending. In 2006 the Ministry of Justice recommended to Parliament that the application of the Seventh-day Adventists to become a state-recognized religion be approved. The Parliament's Human Rights Committee supported the Ministry's recommendation and suggested including this question on Parliament's agenda. The Pentecostals (Evangelical Belief Christian Union) applied in 2004; their request awaited parliamentary consideration.

During the period covered by this report, the OEO Ombudsperson received seven complaints related to religious discrimination; only one was found to have merit. In July 2006 the OEO concluded that non-Catholic or nonreligious students were subjected to indirect discrimination after a student's father alleged that a question on the 2006 national high school graduation English language exam favored Roman Catholics. The question asked students to describe All Saints' Day and Christmas Eve and what these days meant to them. The OEO recommended that the National Examination Center (NEC) avoid topics related to the ethnic or religious identity of students. The NEC admitted that the questions about the Catholic holidays could have been misinterpreted by some students. However, the NEC stated that every student—regardless of religion—taking the exam should be at least partially familiar with the state's main holidays, traditions, and culture, and be able to express their relation to them. The NEC added that grading of the examination was based on the ability to express thoughts in a foreign language, not on knowledge of facts.

The Parliament Ombudsperson received one complaint that the administrator of one municipality exceeded her authority and violated the rights of a religious community in a nursing home. The Ombudsperson determined that the complaint was groundless.

At the end of the reporting period, the Government continued to negotiate with local and international Jewish groups about property restitution and no amendment had been introduced. In early 2002 the Government established a commission on communal property restitution. The commission's task was to identify communal property eligible for restitution and to propose amendments to the law to enable the secular Jewish community to benefit from the restitution process. The Government had promised to propose an amendment in the Parliament several times, including during the spring 2007 session.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

On September 6, 2006, 18 tombstones in a Vilnius Jewish cemetery were vandalized. On June 22, 2006, vandals tore down 22 monuments at the same cemetery.

The President, Prime Minister, and Vilnius mayor criticized the desecrations and urged local law enforcement to find and punish the perpetrators. In both cases the Vilnius municipality restored the monuments with city funds. A pretrial investigation was launched, but no suspects were identified by the end of the reporting period.

In April 2006 the Fortas bar in Kaunas drew condemnation from politicians and television commentators when it marked Hitler's birthday by decorating the bar with Nazi paraphernalia, and its staff dressed as Hitler and SS officials. The bar's director called the event a "masquerade, a carnival, and a funny show." In September 2006 a patron at the same bar dressed as Hitler greeted other customers at the door. Jewish leaders asked the Government to state clearly that Nazi symbols and figures should have no place in the country. Several politicians, including Members of Parliament (MPs) and a deputy mayor of Kaunas, made public statements condemning the incident and the bar for its role in it. The owner of the bar sent a letter of apology to the local Jewish community, stating that the management and staff did not tolerate anti-Semitism.

An August 2005 "bulletin" stamped with the Lithuanian Liberty Union (LLU) party's seal urged persons not to trust a local bank because "Jewish Latvians" allegedly established it. The bank sued the LLU, alleging instigation of hatred toward Jews, and the State Security Department (SSD) conducted an investigation. In 2006 the SSD determined that there was insufficient evidence to support charges of ethnic hatred against Jews.

In May 2005 four to six motorcyclists wearing Nazi-style uniforms rode past the Jewish community headquarters in Vilnius, yelling Nazi epithets. The mayor asked the police to investigate. The Vilnius prosecutor's office initiated an investigation but had not charged anyone with a crime by the end of the reporting period.

In April 2005 a Siauliai City Council member founded a nationalist party with anti-Semitic policies, including stopping the Jewish communal property restitution process. In June 2005 several politicians and Government officials denounced the politician's statements, and the SSD recommended bringing charges. In November 2005 a Siauliai city court found the council member guilty of incitement of ethnic and racial hatred, and fined him $1,937 (5,000 litas). Several of his supporters received lesser fines.

Beginning in 2005 international Jewish groups expressed concern about the construction of a commercial/residential complex on or near the grounds of a historically significant Jewish cemetery in Vilnius. The Russian Czar closed the cemetery in 1831 and constructed fortifications on part of the land. The Soviets subsequently destroyed visible vestiges of the cemetery, disturbing graves and constructing a sports complex on the site. On December 20, 2006, the Prime Minister established a working group, headed by the Vice Minister of Culture, to establish the boundaries of the cemetery. Despite the ongoing investigation by the working group, on February 15, 2007, the city government issued construction permits for a commercial/residential complex on or near the site, based in part on the recommendation of the Cultural Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture.

Following a temporary halt to construction ordered by the Prime Minister in reaction to international pressure, construction resumed. In March 2007 at the request of the Government, the Lithuanian History Institute conducted a study of historical documents and concluded that the construction was within the historical boundaries of the cemetery. In May 2007 a group of 10 Lithuanian and international experts who were invited by the Government to examine the issue unanimously called for a halt to construction and a thorough study of the site. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had not halted the construction or conducted further study.

In February 2004 the popular national daily *Respublika* carried a series of editorials with anti-Semitic overtones under the title "Who Rules the World?" Government officials at the highest levels, local nongovernmental organizations, and other religious groups condemned the series, but the Jewish community and others criticized the Government for responding too slowly. The Prosecutor General's Office and the SSD launched investigations into incitement of ethnic and racial hatred by *Respublika*'s editor-in-chief. In April 2004 Parliament formed a working group to strengthen legislation prohibiting incitement of discord, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. In January 2005 the Journalist Ethics Inspectorate fined *Respublika* $2,350 (6,000 litas) for ethical lapses. In May 2005 a Vilnius administrative court fined the editor-in-chief of the Russian-language version of *Respublika* $390 (1,000 litas) for dissemination of a publication that instigates national, racial, or religious discord. Prosecutors also pursued the editor and owner of *Respublika*, but in September 2005 the Supreme Administrative Court terminated the case against the editor and cancelled the fine of $1,180 (3,000 litas). The court annulled the ruling based on a "double-jeopardy" principle, since prosecutors were simultaneously pur-

suing both administrative and criminal punishment for violation of the same law. In November 2006 the Prosecutor General's Office petitioned the Supreme Administrative Court to reconsider; the court refused.

Anti-Semitic comments were written on unscreened Internet blogs and in unscreened Internet news portals' comments sections.

During the reporting period, the commission on the Holocaust and Soviet crimes published three books, organized seminars for 70 teachers, organized a Holocaust remembrance day on September 23, and celebrated International Tolerance Day at the Parliament on November 15, 2006. An estimated 10 percent of the pre-World War II population was Jewish. More than 200,000 Jews (95 percent of the immediate prewar Jewish population) died in the Holocaust. The country was still working to better understand its past and to make just recompense for its Holocaust involvement. In 1998 President Valdas Adamkus established the commission to investigate crimes of the Holocaust and Soviet occupation. The commission has held annual conferences and several seminars, published several reports, and cosponsored a Holocaust education program

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by the report, the State Register of Legal Entities registered seven traditional religious communities. The state did not deny registration to any religious group which applied.

The Government continued to engage in efforts to foster religious tolerance and understanding. In December 2006 the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee joined a statement of the European Union that condemned the Holocaust denial associated with a conference in Tehran.

In September 2006 the President awarded the Life Saving Cross to 59 persons who had worked to save Jews during the Holocaust. The President commended their selflessness and recognized the substantial number of people who perished during the Holocaust. Forty-one of the awardees received the award posthumously.

In early 2002 the Government established a commission on communal property restitution. The commission's task was to identify communal property eligible for restitution and to propose amendments to the law, enabling the secular Jewish community to benefit from the restitution process. At the end of the reporting period, the Government continued to negotiate with Lithuanian and international Jewish groups about property restitution; no amendment was introduced in the spring 2007 Parliamentary session.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Members of religious minorities occasionally were targets of acts of intolerance, such as insults.

In December 2006 a complaint was filed with the Equal Opportunity Ombudsperson that alleged the television channel MTV Lithuania's program *Popetown* "defamed and debased" the Catholic religion. Also in December the Lithuanian Bishops' Council tried to stop the broadcast of the program through a legal suit but failed. The Journalist Ethics Inspectorate and the Lithuanian Journalists and Publishers Ethics Commission issued statements condemning the broadcast of the program. In March 2007 the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission fined the director of MTV Lithuania $1,180 (3,000 litas) for broadcasting *Popetown*. The official condemnations, however, did not fault MTV Lithuania for religious hatred but for broadcasting the program too early in the evening when children could watch.

SECTION IV. U.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 a close and regular dialogue on religious issues with senior officials in the Government, MPs, and presidential advisors, as well as with religious leaders and concerned nongovernmental groups. Religious groups used the Embassy as a vehicle to voice their complaints, and the Embassy encouraged religious leaders to share their views and concerns on the status of religious freedom.

In March 2007 the Ambassador delivered a speech at an antidiscrimination conference cosponsored by the OEO Ombudsman and the Ministry of Social Security and Labor. The audience included MPs, Government officials, civil society leaders, members of the diplomatic community, and media representatives. Joining a panel that included a Government Minister, an MP, and the Ombudsperson of Equal Opportunities, the Ambassador spoke out in defense of tolerance and strong antidiscrimination legislation as vital protectors of the country's democratic society.

The Embassy actively discussed the restitution of Jewish communal property with Government officials and community leaders. The Embassy also maintained regular contact with U.S.-based missionary groups. The Embassy worked with local and international Jewish groups to encourage the Government to research the historical boundaries of the Jewish cemetery in the Snipiskes area of Vilnius and to protect it as a cultural heritage site. The Ambassador publicly criticized anti-Semitic statements in the media and encouraged a similar response from the highest officials of the Government. The Embassy spoke with Government officials and the local Jewish community about the 2006 incidents of vandalism of a Jewish cemetery. The Embassy supported the efforts of the Jewish Museum in Vilnius to teach local youth about the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and tolerance in schools across the country, with a particular emphasis on rural communities.

In a leading daily newspaper, the Embassy addressed the importance of ensuring a diversity of cultural treasures and guarding against discrimination in the preservation of cultural heritage—especially where a national, religious, or ethnic group is unable to ensure adequate preservation on its own.

LUXEMBOURG

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 999 square miles and a population of 460,000. 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; however, the Ministry of Religious Affairs estimates that more than 90 percent of the population is Catholic. The Lutheran and Calvinist Churches are the largest Protestant denominations. The local press estimates that there are 9,000 Muslims, including 900 refugees from Montenegro; 5,000 Orthodox Christians (Greek, Serbian, Russian, and Romanian); and 1,000 Jews. The Baha'i Faith, the Universal Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses are represented in smaller numbers. There is a small Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) community in Dommeldange, which has been growing since its establishment in 2000. The number of professed atheists is believed to be growing.

There are foreign missionaries, some ministering to English-speaking residents.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion. The Government does not register religious groups. However, based on the Concordat of 1801, some churches receive financial support from the state. The Constitution specifically provides for state payment of salaries and pensions of clergy of those religious groups which sign conventions (agreements) with the Government. Pursuant to negotiated agreements with the Government, the following religious groups receive such support: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Anglican, some Protestant denominations, and Jewish congregations.

The Muslim community submitted an application for financial support from the Government more than 9 years ago, although it wasn't until late 2003 that the Muslim community named a national representative and single interlocutor which would allow discussions over their convention to proceed. This interlocutor heads the 11-member committee, the "Shuura" representing the Muslim community. During the reporting period, the Government drafted a convention which the cabinet approved and submitted to the Shuura, which began the preparation of statutes it intends to

submit to the Government, detailing the procedural operations of the Muslim community including the selection of the mufti and of imams.

The following holy days are considered national holidays: Shrove Monday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, Christmas, and the second day of Christmas. National religious holidays do not have an evident negative effect on other religious groups.

There is a long tradition of religious education in public schools. A 1997 convention between the minister of national education and the 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 hours per week) at the primary school level. Parents and pupils may choose between instruction in Catholicism or an ethics course; requests for exemption from religious instruction are addressed on an individual basis. Approximately 81 percent of primary school students and 57 percent of high school students choose religious instruction.

The Government subsidizes private religious schools. All private, religious, and nonsectarian schools receive Government subsidies if the religious group has a convention with the state. The Government also subsidizes a Catholic seminary.

In 2006 the country's education initiative to provide religious and moral instruction for students in their last year of coursework received favorable notice in the European Union's report on Discrimination and Islamophobia. Currently in its test phase, the initiative, begun as a pilot program in 2004 in one high school, focuses on interfaith dialogue and explains the human values of non-Christian religions. This program was developed in consultation with the Catholic Church and Muslim community, among others, and it is intended to be made universal in the country's school system in 2009.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government does not maintain a list of "sects" and the only distinction made is between religious groups that receive financial funding from the Government and those that do not.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The 2006 European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia report indicates that some business firms have accommodated Muslim employees by permitting breaks for prayer, providing food meeting dietary requirements, requiring no meetings during Ramadan, and permitting holiday leave during Eid al-Fitr. However, these practices did not appear to be widespread.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim groups worked well together on an interfaith basis. Differences among religious groups were 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 policy to promote human rights. An Embassy's officer met with representatives of several Government ministries at a working level to discuss matters related to religious freedom. The officer also met with representatives from religious groups and nongovernmental organizations, none of whom voiced any concern over the state of religious freedom in the country.

MACEDONIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, the law places some limits on religious practice by restricting the registration of religious organizations.

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

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The ongoing dispute between the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox Churches remained unresolved.

U.S. Embassy representatives discussed the draft "Law on the Legal Status of a Church, Religious Community, and Religious Group" with Government and religious leaders on numerous occasions and urged all parties to support a law that meets international standards with respect to human rights and religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 9,781 square miles and a population of 2.1 million. The country's two major religious groups are Orthodox Christianity and Islam. There is a general correlation between ethnicity and religion. The majority of Orthodox believers are ethnic Macedonian, and the majority of Muslim believers are ethnic Albanian. Approximately 65 percent of the population is Macedonian Orthodox, 32 percent is Muslim, 1 percent is Roman Catholic, and 2 percent follow other religious beliefs (largely various Protestant denominations). There is also a small Jewish community, most of whose members reside in Skopje.

Foreign missionaries 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 respected this right in practice. However, the law places some limits on religious practices, including restricting the registration of religious organizations, the establishment of places of worship, the collection of contributions, and locations where religious rites may be held. The law provides for penalties against any person or group that restricts a citizen's right to join a religious organization or participate in religious rituals. The Constitution recognizes the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC), the Islamic community, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and the Methodist Church as "religious communities." All other registered religious organizations are considered to be "religious groups."

The 1997 Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups further defines the constitutional provision for religious freedom. It establishes the procedure for religious organizations to register and prohibits the registration of more than one organization for each religious confession. The law specifies that religious organizations must be registered to perform religious ceremonies, obtain permits to erect religious buildings, or request visas for foreigners coming to the country to undertake religious work. In 1998 and 1999, the Constitutional Court struck down several provisions of the 1997 law, which has resulted in considerable confusion over which provisions are still enforceable. In practice the law was not enforced consistently.

Regulations require that foreigners entering the country to carry out religious work or perform religious rites obtain approval from the State Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups to receive a visa. When applying for visas, such persons must submit a letter of invitation from representatives of a religious organization in the country to the commission, which then issues a letter of approval to be submitted with the visa request.

The law places some restrictions on the locations where religious ceremonies may be held. It provides that religious rites and religious activities "shall take place at churches, mosques, and other temples, and in gardens that are parts of those facilities; at cemeteries; and at other facilities of the religious group." Provision is made for holding services in other places, provided that a permit is obtained from the State Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups at least 15 days in advance. No permit or permission is required to perform religious rites in a private home. The law also states that religious activities "shall not violate the public peace and order, and shall not disrespect the religious feelings and other freedoms and rights" of other citizens.

The law also places some limitations on the collection of contributions by restricting it to places where religious rites and activities are conducted; however, these provisions of the law were not enforced.

Orthodox Easter and Christmas and Ramazan Bajram (end of Ramadan) are observed as national holidays. Other Christian, Islamic, and Jewish holidays are not national holidays, but they are Government-designated religious holidays for adherents of those faiths.

Education laws restrict the establishment of all private primary schools, including parochial schools, and do not allow parents to homeschool their children. However, there are no restrictions placed on religious education that takes place in religious spaces such as churches and mosques. Children below the age of 10 years may not receive religious instruction without the permission of their parents or legal guardians.

On April 16, 2007, Parliament adopted amendments to the law on education to allow for religious education in public schools starting in the 6th year of primary school, when students are approximately 12 years old. Religious instruction is not mandatory. Parents and the student must give consent and specify which religious instruction they wish to receive. The law does not limit the type or number of religious beliefs that can be taught. Courses were to range from religious practice to history of religion and ethics. The new amendments were scheduled to be implemented starting in the 2008–09 academic year.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, restrictions contained in the Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups continued to be applied to a group known as the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid," which denies the MOC's self-declared autocephaly (also not recognized by other Orthodox churches). Led by a defrocked MOC bishop, Jovan Vraniskovski, this schismatic group is recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church as an archbishopric; however, the group continues to exist in the country as an unregistered group after the State Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups rejected its application in 2004 and the Supreme Court rejected the group's appeal in 2005. Members of the group claimed undue Government monitoring or harassment based on their religious beliefs.

The commission did not receive any new applications for the registration of a religious group during the period covered by this report. On January 10, 2007, the Supreme Court upheld a 2006 decision by the commission to reject the application of the Reformist Movement of Adventists. The commission cited a number of grounds for the denial, including that under the law only one group may be registered for each confession. The commission used similar arguments to deny the 2006 application of the Free Protestant Movement. The group's legal appeal was under consideration by the Supreme Court at the end of the period covered by this report.

Churches and mosques often are built without the appropriate building permits; however, the Government normally does not take action against religious groups that build structures without permits. In the past, several Protestant groups were unable to obtain building permits for new church facilities, often because of bureaucratic complications that affect all new construction, religious or secular. Some local human rights organizations stated that religious organizations who reported trouble obtaining building permits often had not followed the proper legal procedures for obtaining a permit. However, members of Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that Government officials discriminated against their religious group by refusing to issue a building permit even though the group is officially registered and the proper documentation was provided.

The problem of restitution of religious properties expropriated by the former Yugoslav Government was not fully resolved. Many religious communities had extensive grounds or other properties expropriated by the Communist regime, and they have not regained full ownership of many of the properties. Ownership of almost all churches and many mosques has been restored to the appropriate religious community, but that was not the case for most of the other properties. Restitution or compensation claims are complicated by the fact that the seized properties have changed hands many times or have been developed. The Islamic Community of Macedonia (ICM) claimed it was not able to regain rightful use of several mosques that the Government had agreed to return. In addition, the ICM alleged that in some cases the Government delayed the process of restitution by selling or starting new construction on disputed property and by questioning the historical legal claim of the ICM to religious properties. The ICM and the MOC cited greater difficulty in obtaining ownership of previously owned property if the property was located in a desirable location for investors or business owners, often in urban areas.

The Jewish community continued to work with the Government for the full restitution of individual property confiscated by the former Yugoslav Government. The 2000 Law on Denationalization established a system for community and individual

property restitution and a fund that regulates restitution for Holocaust victims without heirs. The Jewish community is the only religious group whose community property has been fully restituted. However, the process of individual property restitution continued to be slow, in large part because of the extensive documentation required to show the chain of ownership and lack of heirs. Construction of a Memorial Holocaust Center for the Jews from Macedonia, initiated in 2005 with property and funds restituted in accordance with the Denationalization Law, slowed considerably beginning in late 2006.

The Bektashi, a Sufi Islamic group, sued the Government for failing to reverse the former Yugoslavia's nationalization of the Bektashi's Tetovo compound, known as the Arabati Baba Tekke. The Bektashi also filed suit against the ICM, armed members of which seized part of the complex in 2002. At the end of the period covered by this report, the ICM continued to occupy the area. The ICM claimed that the property belonged to them, since the Bektashi are a "sect" of Islam; however, the Bektashi are registered as a separate religious group and alleged that the property belonged strictly to the Bektashi community and not the Islamic community as a whole. The dispute continued at the end of the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On April 25, 2007, Jovan Vraniskovski, leader of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid," was released from prison after serving 9 months of a 12-month sentence for embezzlement. He began serving the sentence on August 8, 2006, after being convicted of embezzling $72,000 (€54,000) donated to the MOC. Vraniskovski continued to claim that he did not embezzle the money and that the conviction was a result of discrimination against him for his religious beliefs. On February 22, 2007, the Veles trial court accepted Vraniskovski's appeal for an early release due to good behavior. Vraniskovski was free at the end of the period covered by this report and did not face further imprisonment. Following his release from prison, a representative of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" said that Government officials continued to refuse to return Vraniskovski's passport.

On April 10, 2007, Vraniskovski was acquitted for a second time on a separate charge involving $410,000 (€324,000) allegedly embezzled from MOC funds while he was still a bishop with the MOC. Vraniskovski previously had served 7 months of an 18-month prison sentence on a 2004 conviction for "inciting religious or ethnic hatred." A 2006 Supreme Court decision reduced the sentence to time served and suspended a separate sentence for "falsely assuming religious authority." The 18-month sentence was based on charges that Vraniskovski held private religious services in union with the Serbian Orthodox Church and that he was responsible for the content of a religious calendar describing the MOC as "the last fortress of communism" and its believers as heretics. The suspended sentence resulted from charges that in 2003 Vraniskovski allegedly baptized a relative in an MOC church near Bitola. Authorities claimed his act constituted trespassing and "falsely assuming religious authority," since earlier he had been defrocked by the MOC and therefore was not authorized to perform religious rites in that church.

In December 2006 Jehovah's Witnesses reported that police harassed a number of their members in the town of Kichevo. The incidents were brought to the attention of officials in the central offices of the Ministry of Interior, who worked with the local police and members of the religious group; the result was the first-ever visit by the Director of the State Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups to the group's headquarters in Skopje. Leaders in the Jehovah's Witnesses community reported that the situation was resolved satisfactorily.

While in prison Jovan Vraniskovski was considered by some human rights organizations to be a religious prisoner. There were no additional reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Jewish leaders reported a number of instances in which unidentified persons sprayed graffiti containing Nazi content or symbols in the towns of Skopje, Bitola, and Stip. Authorities promptly responded to the incidents and believed that the perpetrators were not part of an organized group but likely were young individuals acting on their own.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

After taking office in September 2006, the Government increased efforts to reach out to different religious communities. Specific examples included high-level Government attendance at various religious ceremonies and events and increased communication with religious communities, predominately through the State Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. On May 20, 2007, unidentified perpetrators set fire to a mosque in Obednik, a small southwestern village. The fire caused little damage, and local authorities believed the perpetrators were not from the village. The act was an isolated case and did not appear to be an organized effort. The Islamic and Orthodox communities publicly condemned the attack.

The Bektashi reported that on March 21, 2007, a large photograph at the entrance to the Arabati Baba Tekke compound was vandalized and a number of plants and trees on the grounds of the compound were destroyed. Police investigated the incident, found the perpetrators, and reportedly increased police presence at the compound.

On February 10, 2007, Bishop Marko, a member of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid," was performing a religious ceremony at a public cemetery in Bitola when two members of a security firm, allegedly employed by MOC priests, pressured him to leave the cemetery. Marko refused, and the security guards physically assaulted him and destroyed his religious censer. Local police were called and reportedly also told Marko to leave, on the grounds that the cemetery was MOC property.

There continued to be isolated reports of vandalism at Macedonian Orthodox churches. The MOC considered these acts to be incidents of petty theft and did not believe that they were motivated by religious beliefs or discrimination.

The continued denial of the MOC's autocephaly by the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" and the Serbian Orthodox Church at times provoked angry responses by the public, press, and Government, who viewed this rejection as an attack on the country's national identity.

Contrary to the previous year, no students affiliated with Vraniskovski's group reported that they were asked to leave the Orthodox theology school in Skopje.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Ambassador and Embassy representatives frequently met with Government officials and also with leaders and representatives of the various religious communities to address religious freedom issues and support the Government's policy of ethnic and religious tolerance. Embassy representatives discussed the draft law on religion with Government and religious leaders on numerous occasions and urged all parties to support a law meeting international standards with respect to human rights and religious freedom.

The Ambassador and other Embassy representatives continued to follow developments in the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" case and discussed the matter with the President, Prime Minister, MOC officials, and representatives of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid." Embassy officials urged respect for religious freedom and the rule of law, as well as moderation in language on both sides.

The Ambassador attended events to foster religious freedom, tolerance, and understanding, including Holocaust commemoration events.

MALTA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious beliefs or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago, consisting of three inhabited islands in the Mediterranean Sea, and has an area of 122 square miles. Its population is 400,000. The overwhelming majority of citizens (an estimated 95 percent as of 2004) are Roman Catholic, and approximately 53 percent (2005 estimate) attend Sunday services regularly. All or almost all of the country's political leaders are practicing Roman Catholics. The country joined the European Union in 2004, and the Government supported the failed effort to include a reference to "Europe's Christian heritage" in the European Constitution.

Most congregants at the local Protestant churches are not citizens but rather include some of the many British retirees who live in the country or vacationers from other countries. Of the Protestant churches, the Church of England has a congregation of approximately 270 members; the united congregations of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches number 120, and the Evangelical Church of Germany has approximately 70 members. Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include a union of 16 groups of evangelical churches comprising Pentecostal and other nondenominational churches, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Bible Baptist Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Zen Buddhism, and the Baha'i Faith. There is a Jewish congregation with an estimated 100 members. There is one mosque and a Muslim primary school. Of the estimated 3,000 Muslims, approximately 2,250 are foreigners, 600 are naturalized citizens, and 150 are native-born citizens. An estimated 2 percent of the population does not formally practice any religion, including professed atheists.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 duty and the right to teach which principles are right and which are wrong." Divorce is not available in the country. However, the state generally recognizes divorces of individuals domiciled abroad who have undergone divorce proceedings in a competent court.

The Government and the Catholic Church participated in a foundation which financed Catholic schools and provided free tuition in those schools.

The Government subsidized children living in church-sponsored residential homes.

To promote tolerance, school curriculums include studies in human rights, ethnic relations, and cultural diversity as part of values education. Religious groups are not required to be licensed or registered.

There is one Muslim private school with approximately 120 students. Work continued on a projected 500-grave Muslim cemetery that began in 2005.

There are 6 holy days that are also national holidays: the Motherhood of Our Lady, St. Paul's Shipwreck, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the Assumption, and Christmas Day.

All religious organizations have similar legal rights. Religious organizations can own property including 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 parent or guardian objects, and this right was respected in practice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The Catholic Church makes its presence and its influence felt in everyday life; however, non-Catholics, including converts from Catholicism, do not face legal or so-

cietal discrimination. Relations between the Catholic Church and non-Catholic religious groups are characterized by respect and cooperation. Practitioners of non-Catholic religious groups proselytize freely and 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 Embassy's private discussions with Government officials and its informational programs for the public consistently emphasize basic human rights including freedom of religion.

Through a variety of public affairs programs, the Embassy continued to work with different sectors of society, including religious groups, to promote interfaith dialogue, religious freedom, and tolerance. Initiatives included increased outreach to the local chapter of the World Islamic Call Society and other members of the Muslim community, including Muslim students enrolled at the University of Malta. The Embassy also had regular contact with the Jewish community.

MOLDOVA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, the law includes restrictions that at times inhibited the activities of some religious groups. On May 11, 2007, Parliament passed a new law on religion that dealt with many of these problems; however, the President returned the law to Parliament for reconsideration on June 18, 2007. No further action was taken by the end of the reporting period.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to uphold its earlier decisions to deny some groups registration, although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) was registered in December 2006. In the separatist region of Transnistria, which is not controlled by the Government, authorities continued to deny registration to a number of minority religious groups and harass their members.

There were few reports of societal abuses based on religious belief or practice; however, some branches of the Christian Orthodox faith suffered discrimination. There were reports that Protestants and parachurch groups experienced harassment from local town councils as well as from Orthodox priests and adherents.

The U.S. Embassy raised concerns at the highest levels of the Government regarding the persistent registration difficulties faced by some religious groups. In January 2007 the U.S. Ambassador hosted a gathering for Government officials and leaders of 21 religious groups to support the expansion of religious freedom in the country.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 13,000 square miles and a population, including Transnistria's 555,000 inhabitants, of 3.9 million.

The predominant religion is Christian Orthodox. According to various estimates, more than 90 percent of the population nominally belongs to either of two Orthodox denominations, Moldovan or Bessarabian. However, official numbers are available only for properties and parishes associated with religious organizations; the State Service for Religious Affairs (SSRA) keeps no statistics for numbers of adherents or numbers of those who regularly attend services.

According to the SSRA, the Moldovan Orthodox Church (MOC), affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church, has 1,255 parishes; the Bessarabian Orthodox Church (BOC), affiliated with the Romanian Orthodox Church, has 219 parishes; and the Old Rite Russian Orthodox Church (Old Believers) has 15 parishes. There was no information on the number of parishes or followers of the True Orthodox Church of Moldova (also known as the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad), which the Government has refused to register. The religious traditions of the Orthodox churches are entwined with the culture and patrimony of the country.

Adherents of other religious groups include Roman Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, Jews, followers of Reverend Sun Myung Moon, Molokans (a Russian group), Messianic Jews (who believe that Jesus is the Messiah), Lutherans, Presbyterians, Hare Krishnas, and other charismatic and evangelical Christian groups. The largest non-Orthodox group is the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists, which has 260 reg-

istered parishes and claims 550 churches. Jehovah's Witnesses have 163 registered congregations and claim 234 Kingdom Halls, with 17,000 adherents. The Seventh-day Adventists have 147 congregations. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has 2 congregations and an estimated 250 members.

The SSRA lists eight Jewish congregations. According to the most recent estimates from the Jewish cultural center in Chisinau, the Jewish community has approximately 24,000 members, including 15,000 in Chisinau; 2,500 in Balti and surrounding areas; 1,600 in Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria; 1,000 in Bender, a right-bank town occupied by Transnistrian authorities; and 4,000 in small towns. Government figures count 3,608 Jews in Moldova and approximately 1,200 in Transnistria. These figures reflect the ethnic identity declared to census takers in 2004 but not religious affiliation, since the census allowed respondents to make only one choice of ethnic identity. The 2004 census results reported by Transnistrian authorities claim 7,200 Jews in the region.

Foreign missionaries are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, the law on religions contains restrictions that inhibited activities of unregistered religious groups (see Restrictions on Religious Freedom). The law provides for freedom of religious practice. It also protects the confidentiality of statements made to a priest in the confessional, allows denominations to establish associations and foundations, and states that the Government may not interfere in the religious activities of denominations.

On April 4, 2007, the Council of Europe urged authorities to adopt legislation that would clearly define a group's right to obtain recognition as a religious community and have access to remedy in the case of refusal. The Council of Europe also criticized the draft law on religion for failing to define clearly the right of recognition, including full legal personality, of all religious communities, including those with fewer than 100 members. In addition, the Council of Europe criticized the law for failing to clarify the conditions under which the Minister of Justice may request the courts to prohibit activities of certain religious communities. The Council of Europe's criticisms were not addressed by Parliament prior to its passing the law.

On June 18, 2007, the President returned to Parliament the new law on religions passed on May 11. According to press reports, President Vladimir Voronin criticized the new law because it did not describe Orthodoxy as the country's "traditional" religion and simplified registration for "nontraditional" religious groups, leaving loopholes for proselytization by new groups. On several occasions the President criticized the BOC as corrupt and vigorously questioned the need for more than one Orthodox confession in the country.

There is no state religion; however, the MOC receives favored treatment from the Government. The Metropolitan of Chisinau and all Moldova is issued a diplomatic passport. Other high-ranking MOC officials also reportedly have diplomatic passports. The Metropolitan participates as the sole religious figure in some national celebrations.

The law specifies that "in order to organize and function," religious organizations must be registered with the Government. Unregistered groups may not own property, obtain construction permits for churches or seminaries, open bank accounts, hire employees, or obtain space in public cemeteries in their own names. Individual churches or branches of registered religious organizations are not required to register with local authorities; however, a branch must register locally to carry out legal transactions and receive donations.

The procedures for registering a religious organization are the same for all groups. A religious organization must present a declaration of creation, bylaws, and an explanation of its basic religious beliefs to the SSRA. The SSRA is required by law to register the religious organization within 30 working days, but in practice it often delays registration, sometimes for years. At the request of the SSRA, a court can annul the recognition of a religious organization if it "carries out activities that harm the independence, sovereignty, integrity, and security of the Republic of Moldova, public order, or is connected with political activities." The law also prohibits religious organizations from including in their bylaws any provisions that would violate the Constitution or any other laws.

A 1994 bylaw requiring the approval of local authorities to register components of religious organization continued to cause problems (see Abuses of Religious Freedom). Authorities in Transnistria also imposed registration requirements that nega-

tively affected religious groups and denied registration to some groups (see Restrictions on Religious Freedom).

The 1992 law on religions legalized proselytizing; however, the 1999 amendments explicitly forbid "abusive proselytizing." During the period covered by this report, authorities did not take legal action against any individual for such proselytizing.

The criminal code permits punishment for "preaching religious beliefs or performance of religious rituals which cause harm to the health of citizens, or other harm to their persons or rights, or instigate citizens not to participate in public life or in the fulfillment of their obligations as citizens." No organization was prosecuted under the code during the period covered by this report. Likewise, the law on combating extremism was not used against any religious group or opposition organization.

Article 200 of the administrative offenses code prohibits any religious activities of registered or unregistered religious groups that violate legislation. The article also allows the expulsion of foreign citizens who engage in religious activities without the consent of authorities.

Foreign missionaries may enter the country for 90 days on a tourist visa. Foreign religious workers must register with, and receive documentation from, the SSRA, the National Agency for the Occupation of the Work Force, the Bureau for Migration and Asylum (in the Ministry of Interior), and the Ministry of Informational Development. Registration procedures are onerous and are at times applied in a discriminatory fashion.

According to the law on education, "moral and spiritual instruction" is mandatory for primary school students and optional for secondary school and university students. Some schools offer religion courses, but enrollment depends on parental request and the availability of funds. There are a number of theological institutes, seminaries, and other places of religious education.

Two public schools and a kindergarten are open only to Jewish students; in Chisinau one kindergarten has a special "Jewish group"; however, Jewish students are not restricted to these schools. The schools receive the same funding as other state schools and are supplemented financially by the community. Total enrollment for Jewish schools remained approximately 550.

A 2002 Government decision authorizes local authorities to determine, at their discretion, the denomination to which a parish belongs and to transfer its property to that denomination. Parishes in some communities have protested the transfer of their properties.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The law on religions contains restrictions that inhibit the activities of unregistered religious groups, and the Government continued to deny registration to some groups. In some cases members of unregistered religious groups held services in homes, nongovernmental organization (NGO) offices, and other locations. In other cases groups obtained property and permits in the names of individual members.

On February 27, 2007, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in favor of the Church of the True Orthodox-Moldova, a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, compelling the Government to register it and pay $15,600 (€12,000) in damages. However, at the end of the period covered by this report, the Church remained unregistered.

In October 2006 the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church approved the establishment of two new MOC bishoprics in the country. To protest the appointment of 1 bishop on moral grounds, 30 Orthodox priests from the Ungheni region switched their allegiance from the MOC to the BOC. Only half of them received acknowledgement from local authorities; the other 15 sued the SSRA for denying registration. There were no developments in the case at the end of the period covered by this report.

On September 20, 2006, the Supreme Court referred the case regarding the refusal of the Floresti Raion District to consider the Domulgeni Jehovah's Witnesses' application for registration back to the Balti Court of Appeals, which on December 7, 2006, referred the case back to the Floresti City Court. At the end of the period covered by this report, the court had not made a decision.

The SSRA continued to deny registration to the True Orthodox Church of Moldova as well as to the Spiritual Organization of Muslims and the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Moldova. (The latter is associated with the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States). At the end of the period covered by this report, the lawsuit filed by the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Moldova against the SSRA for failing to register the Spiritual Organization of Muslims remained under review by the Chisinau Court of Appeals.

Some missionaries were denied permission to live and work in the country by Government officials, who cited a numerical cap of 1,800 on work permits, a figure not published in laws or administrative regulations. The officials told missionaries that they did not need work permits to preach the Bible, claiming that 3 months was sufficient for the activity. In addition, some foreign religious workers were prevented from registering because of bureaucratic delays and had to start the process anew upon their return to the country.

The law provides for restitution of property confiscated during successive Fascist and Soviet regimes to politically repressed or exiled persons, but the provision does not apply to religious organizations. However, local authorities can make arrangements with local parishes to return church properties; in practice, these arrangements almost always benefit the MOC. After independence in 1991, Orthodox churches affiliated themselves with the BOC or MOC on the basis of the loyalty of the priest and the congregation. Several churches later changed sides. Partly because of lack of access to records, the BOC has not been able to give an exact count of the churches which they believe ought to be returned to BOC possession. Property disputes between the MOC and BOC remained unresolved.

On March 14, 2007, the SSRA recognized the BOC as the historical, spiritual, and canonical successor of the Romanian Orthodox Church that existed in the country until 1946 but did not address the issue of legal succession and the property rights associated with it. At the end of the reporting period, the ECHR had made no decision regarding the Government's 2001 decision that made the MOC the successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church for purposes of all property ownership.

In October 2006 the Floresti BOC parish lodged a petition at the ECHR regarding the ownership of a church that the MOC also claimed as its property. At the end of the reporting period, no decision had been made.

The Lutheran Church claimed properties, most of which were destroyed in World War II. In addition to the usual legal arguments, Government authorities told Lutheran officials that properties would not be returned because there were not enough congregants to support their use.

The Jewish community owned 77 synagogues in Chisinau before World War II but had no plans to reclaim any of them; it maintained that the present synagogue, which was allowed to remain open in the Soviet period, was sufficient for the community's religious needs.

In Transnistria authorities used registration requirements and other legal mechanisms to restrict the religious freedom of some religious groups. Authorities reportedly told evangelical religious groups meeting in private homes that they did not have the correct permits to use their residences as venues for religious services.

There was no resolution regarding the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tiraspol. Authorities continued to prevent the group from reregistering and from obtaining the fiscal registration number necessary to conduct business. Although the courts allowed the community to challenge such decisions, postponed hearings and failure of Government respondents to appear prevented legal resolution of the problem. For example, due to the repeated failure of administration representatives to appear, the Tiraspol City Court postponed a hearing originally scheduled for June 2006 to consider the Jehovah's Witnesses complaint regarding the inaction of the Transnistrian "presidential administration" to adjudicate the group's registration application. Similar problems occurred in other Transnistrian cities.

Transnistrian authorities continued to use a textbook at all school levels containing negative and defamatory allegations regarding Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Transnistria Baptist community's application for registration, submitted in 2004, remained under review at the end of the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Between February 8 and 11, 2007, representatives of an evangelical NGO were detained for questioning in Vadu lui Voda after a policeman interrupted their seminar by questioning their right to conduct religious services and hire a foreign speaker. Although the representatives claimed that they were conducting seminars on drug and alcohol abuse, not religious services, and had the right to conduct Bible study specified in the NGO's registration papers, they were taken to court and fined.

The Spiritual Organization of Muslims continued to report harassment by police. During the reporting period, the Migration Bureau of the Ministry of Interior interrupted Friday prayers once and summoned the organization's leader to court. The trial had not taken place by the end of the period covered by this report. Since 2004 police have often shown up at the group's Friday prayers, which are held at the offices of the local Islamic organization Calauza, to check participants' documents and take pictures.

During the period covered by this report, Transnistrian courts sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses to punishments ranging from a fine of $400 (3,360 TNR rubles) to 12 months' probation. Since 1995 a total of 20 members of Jehovah's Witnesses have been prosecuted in Transnistria for their conscientious objection to 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 had 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

On December 29, 2006, the SSRA granted recognition to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

On December 20, 2006, Jehovah's Witnesses received an award of court costs and moral damages from the Comrat Court of Appeals against the Office of the Mayor of Comrat, which had suspended work on a Kingdom Hall and permitted interference with construction work. Courts ruled in favor of the communities in similar cases in Cruzesti, Milcoci, Orhei, Sangera, and Domulgheni. On December 7, 2006, local authorities issued construction and occupancy permits for a Kingdom Hall in Ghindesti.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

On March 19, 2007, five tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Chisinau were knocked over. Jewish leaders considered the act to be vandalism and stated that they had experienced no anti-Semitic incidents during the period covered by this report. Similar acts occurred in previous years.

On January 15, 2007, the Chisinau office of the daily newspaper *Timpul* was assaulted by approximately 20 alleged MOC supporters, who threw eggs to protest articles that criticized a "Holy Trinity" of politicians. On February 2, 2007, the Buiucani Court decided that there were no grounds for pressing criminal charges, a decision that *Timpul* contested in court. The trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported several incidents. In Floresti on November 5, 2006, an Orthodox priest verbally attacked a member and forced him to leave the village. On November 4, 2006, an individual in Tohatin verbally abused a member and kicked him twice. The victims filed complaints with police in both cases. Jehovah's Witnesses reported no further developments in either case. On October 30, 2006, in Criuleni, an Orthodox priest verbally attacked a member of the group. On August 31, 2006, an Orthodox priest verbally attacked a member in Floresti and slapped her daughter. No legal action was taken against either priest.

On September 8, 2006, a Pentecostal pastor in Nisporeni attempted to conduct an outdoor service of music, preaching, and distribution of food in the town but was physically prevented from doing so by local Orthodox priests, who led a procession through the site and then brought in a food inspector who stopped the distribution of food, although the food had an inspection certificate. The mayor telephoned the SSRA, which stated that the service was authorized; however, the mayor was unable to convince the priests to stop their interference. There were no further developments in the case.

On July 17, 2006, three Orthodox priests threatened foreign missionaries who were renovating a former store to become a Pentecostal church in Pirlita. On July 19, the priests and several men entered the building, forced out the workers, threw tools out the window, and severed electrical connections. On the evening of July 21, the building was burned down. The owner of the building brought suit against a priest as ring leader and two individuals as perpetrators. On November 15, 2006, the local appeals court in Balti ruled the defendants innocent because of lack of evidence. There were no appeals of the decision.

The dispute between the Moldovan and the Bessarabian Orthodox Churches continued during the reporting period.

Conversion from Orthodoxy, and especially from the MOC, could lead to ostracism in smaller towns and villages.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

In January 2007 the U.S. Ambassador held a reception in honor of religious freedom, hosting the head of the SSRA, his assistant, and representatives of 21 religious organizations, registered and unregistered, including the MOC, BOC, Old Rite Russian Orthodox Church, and Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Religious leaders reported

that this was the first such meeting in the history of the country. The Ambassador encouraged all who were present to continue their efforts to promote religious freedom and harmony.

On other occasions the Ambassador met with leaders of the major religious organizations, including the MOC, BOC, Catholic Church, and the Jewish community. U.S. Embassy representatives continued to maintain contact with religious leaders, most of the resident American missionaries, and other foreign religious workers throughout the country.

U.S. Embassy officers met with leaders and legal representatives of many religious organizations to discuss registration, restitution, and other problems that organizations had with the authorities. The Embassy raised concerns at the highest levels of the Government regarding the persistent registration difficulties of some religious groups, and an Embassy officer met the head of the SSRA to discuss registration problems. In addition, the Embassy sent diplomatic notes to the Government expressing concern about continued delays in registering some groups as well as the difficulty in obtaining permits to construct places of worship.

MONACO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. Roman Catholicism is the official religion. Religious freedom, freedom of religious practice, and public expression are provided for in articles 2, 9, and 23 of the Constitution.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government denies permission to operate to religious organizations it regards as "sects."

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The principality has an area of 0.8 square miles and a population of 35,000. Catholicism is the state religion, and most of the approximately 7,200 Monegasque citizens adhere to that faith, at least nominally. There were five Catholic churches in the principality, in addition to a cathedral. An archbishop presides over the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Monaco. Protestantism is the next most practiced religion, with two churches. There was a Greek Orthodox church and one synagogue. The Constitution provides the 28,000 noncitizen residents the same religious freedom as citizens. Most noncitizens also adhere to either Catholicism or Protestantism, although there are some who practice Judaism, Islam, or other religious beliefs. There are an estimated 1,000 Jewish noncitizen residents. There are no mosques. No missionaries operated in the principality.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. Catholicism is the state religion and most citizens practiced it. Catholic ritual generally played an important role in state festivities such as the annual national day celebration and significant events in the life of the ruling family.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

No missionaries operated in the principality, and proselytizing was strongly discouraged. However, there is no law against proselytizing by religious organizations that are registered formally by the Ministry of State. Authorities routinely have denied registration to organizations regarded as religious "sects"; 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 in the principality.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. There is an active ecumenical movement. Periodically through the year, religious leaders of various denominations participate in joint religious services as well as cultural events in order to promote greater understanding and mutual tolerance among different confessions. Representatives of all religious groups are invited to participate in state celebrations in the Cathedral of Monaco. 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.

MONTENEGRO

The law 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were some instances of societal discrimination directed against representatives of religious minorities.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 5,417 square miles and a population of 630,000. According to the 2003 census, more than 74 percent of the population is Orthodox, 18 percent Muslim, and 3.5 percent Roman Catholic. The remaining population is largely agnostic, atheist, or undeclared.

Several foreign missionaries from various religious groups are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and laws provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. The Constitution mentions the Orthodox Church, Islamic religious community, and Roman Catholic Church by name, stating that these and other religions are separate from the state. There is no legislation to regulate the work of religious communities. Religious studies have not been introduced as a subject in primary or secondary schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The "reis" (leader) of the Islamic community noted that Muslim prisoners had difficulty in receiving "halal" food, such as meals without pork. The Government did not allow Muslim women to wear headscarves when being photographed for official purposes.

The Serbian Orthodox Church claimed long delays by the Government in returning its property, which comprises a significant part of the country's territory. The Catholic Church also announced claims on property in several locations. The law on restitution treats religious property as it treats privately owned property; however, in practice the Government did not take any action regarding the claims. In March 2007 the Government adopted amendments to the law and forwarded them to Parliament, but Parliament took no action concerning the amendments.

On June 7, 2006, the 2004 land ownership case between the Government and Catholic priest Don Branko Sbutega was closed due to his death in April 2006.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some instances of societal discrimination against representatives of religious minorities; however, religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout the country, and it was difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin.

Tensions continued between the Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches. The two groups continued to contend for adherents and make conflicting property claims, but the contention was not marked by significant violence. On April 18, 2007, police prevented several hundred members of the noncanonical Montenegrin Orthodox Church (MOC) from holding a service in the Serbian Orthodox monastery in Cetinje. The MOC, registered as a nongovernmental organization, maintained that all Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) religious facilities belong to the MOC, claiming that the SOC forcibly occupied them after the country united with Serbia in 1918. The MOC announced that it would take over all Orthodox facilities, with or without the help of the state. The SOC replied that it was the only legitimate owner of the Orthodox monasteries and churches. The Government recognizes the existence of both groups, and President Filip Vujanovic announced that the state would guarantee the property rights of all legal owners, including those of the SOC.

There were reports that disagreements between ethnic Albanian Muslims and Catholics became more pronounced after the police operation "Eagle's Flight," in which 15 ethnic Albanian Catholics were arrested in September 2006 on charges of terrorism. Their trial began on May 14, 2007, and was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. There were reports that underlying the terrorism plots was a struggle for political leadership between Catholic and Muslim Albanians in northern Albania.

Incidents occurred in Ulcinj and Podgorica in which so-called Wahhabis attacked imams in mid-2006. In Ulcinj Wahhabis attacked imam Resulbegovic Safet and his father four times. The First Instance Court of Ulcinj levied fines against the perpetrators in all four cases. In Podgorica Admir Pepic verbally threatened the "reis" Rifat Fejzic. Police reported that criminal charges were brought against Pepic.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and continued to promote ethnic and religious tolerance throughout the country. U.S. Embassy officials met regularly with leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, to promote respect for religious freedom and human rights.

THE NETHERLANDS

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

Anti-Semitic incidents continued to occur; many appeared to be correlated with developments in the Middle East. Openly expressed societal resentment toward growing numbers of Muslims and their culture continued and fueled social tensions between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

The U.S. 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 16,485 square miles and a population of 16.3 million. Approximately 60 percent of the population has some religious affiliation, although many do not actively practice their religion. Approximately 55 percent consider themselves Christian; 6 percent Muslim; 3 percent other (Hindu, Jewish, or Buddhist); and 36 percent atheist or agnostic.

Society has become increasingly secularized. In general, church membership continued to decline. According to a 2006 study by the Government's Social Cultural Planning Bureau, church membership declined steadily from 76 percent of the population in 1958 to 30 percent in 2006 (16 percent Catholic and 14 percent Protestant). Only 16 percent regularly go to church. Although 55 percent regard themselves as Christian, among this group only 30 percent believe in God, while 50 percent are agnostic or hold vaguely defined beliefs. The European Values Study showed that of all Europeans, the Dutch consistently have the lowest levels of appreciation for religious institutions.

Roman Catholics constitute the largest religious group in the country; however, many express alienation from their religious hierarchy and doctrine. While 78 percent view the church as an important anchor of norms and values, 68 percent dismiss the church's views on social issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and divorce.

The country's Protestantism is heterogeneous. Among the Protestant churches, the Dutch Reformed Church remains the largest. Other Protestant denominations include Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Remonstrants.

An estimated 950,000 Muslims, constituting 5.8 percent of the total population, live in the country, primarily in the larger cities, including approximately 370,000 of Turkish background and 330,000 of Moroccan background. Other Muslims include those from the country's former colony of Suriname as well as large numbers of asylum seekers from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia. A network of mosques and cultural centers serves the Muslim community. There are approximately 400 mosques: more than half service the Turkish community, while another 140 and 50 cater to the Moroccan and Surinamese communities, respectively. The Contact Body for Muslims and Government, representing approximately 80 percent of the Muslim community, discusses the community's interests with the Government.

Research from the Jewish Social Work organization showed that the country has approximately 45,000 Jews, although the Stephen Roth Institute and the Council of Europe estimates the number at closer to 30,000. Less than one-quarter of those belong to active Jewish organizations. The Central Jewish Consultation, an umbrella group of the Jewish community's main organizations, represents the community's interests in discussions with the Government.

There are approximately 95,000 Hindus, of whom 85 percent originally came from Suriname and approximately 10 percent from India. The country hosts smaller numbers of Hindus from Uganda, as well as similar movements based on such Hindu teachings as Ramakrishna, Hare Krishna, Sai Baba, and Osho. The Buddhist community has approximately 17,000 members.

A small number of 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 education funding to public and religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and health care facilities, irrespective of their religious affiliation. To qualify for funding, institutions must meet strict nonreligious criteria in curriculum, minimum size, and health care.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, the law recognizes the existence of religious denominations and grants them certain rights and privileges, including tax exemptions. Although the law does not formally define what constitutes a "religious denomination" for these purposes, religious groups generally have not experienced any problems qualifying as religious denominations.

The Government of Turkey exercises influence within the country's Turkish Muslim 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, which maintains connections with the approximately 100 Moroccan mosques through a federation of Moroccan friendship societies but has no mechanism to exercise direct influence in the country. Authorities continued to express concern regarding Turkish and Moroccan interference with religious and political affairs, because such interference appeared to run counter to Government efforts to encourage integration of Muslims into society.

To counter undesired foreign influence, the Government continued to provide subsidies to universities providing training for local persons interested in becoming imams to ensure that they have a basic understanding of local social norms and values. Selected universities cooperated with the main Muslim organizations on designing training programs. The Government continued to require all imams and other spiritual leaders recruited in Muslim countries to complete a yearlong integration course before permitting them to practice in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Disputes arose when the exercise of the rights to freedom of religion and speech clashed with the strictly enforced ban on discrimination. Such disputes were addressed either in the courts or by antidiscrimination boards. Complaints were repeatedly filed against religious or political spokesmen who publicly condemned homosexuality. However, longstanding jurisprudence dictates that such statements, when made on religious grounds, do not constitute a criminal offense absent an intention to offend or discriminate against homosexuals.

The Equal Opportunities Committee and the courts repeatedly addressed the wearing of headscarves in schools and places of employment. The prevailing legal opinion holds that the wearing of headscarves may be banned only on narrow grounds, such as security considerations or inconsistency with an official Government uniform. As it had done in the previous year, in 2006 Parliament adopted a resolution urging the Government to ban public wearing of burqas (a loose robe worn by some Muslim women that covers the body from head to toe). Legal experts consulted by the previous Integration Minister opined, however, that a general ban (as requested by Parliament) does not appear possible under the law. The Government stated in February 2007 that it is willing to consider banning "face-covering clothing in the interest of public order and safety."

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 law 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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The vast majority of the population is not anti-Semitic. However, certain groups opposed to Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories, such as the Arab European League and the Stop the Occupation Movement, frequently used seemingly anti-Semitic language and images to express political views. Explicitly anti-Semitic sentiments also prevailed among certain segments of the Muslim community and among fringe nationalist and neo-Nazi groups. Two distinct groups were responsible for most anti-Semitic incidents: North Africans in sympathy with Palestinians and supporters of right-wing extremist ideologies.

The frequency of incidents appeared to be correlated to the political situation in the Middle East. In its report covering the period between January 2005 and May 2006, the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) registered 159 anti-Semitic incidents in 2005, compared to 326 in 2004; however, in an appendix on incidents that occurred during the July–August 2006 conflict in Lebanon, it recorded a sharp increase (105). Although the overall number of incidents tended to decrease, CIDI identified as one major cause for anti-Semitic behavior the dissemi-

nation of anti-Western and anti-Semitic propaganda from the Middle East, as well as sermons by imams that promulgated anti-Semitic stereotypes.

Anti-Semitism among right-wing extremists appeared to increase during the reporting period. The independent Registration Center for Discrimination on the Internet described several hundred right-wing Web sites as extremist, including those of Stormfront.org, Polinico, National Alliance, and Holland Hardcore. The sites targeted not only Jews but also Muslims, blacks, and homosexuals.

Extreme rightwing anti-Semites expressed themselves primarily by vandalizing Jewish buildings and monuments, and CIDI expressed concern about the sharply increased vandalism of monuments and desecration of cemeteries. Dozens of such incidents were recorded during the reporting period. In late October 2006, for example, 15 gravestones were vandalized in a Jewish cemetery in Beek.

CIDI, which frequently criticized what it regarded as inadequate prosecution of anti-Semitic events by the Public Prosecutor's Office, reported considerable improvement during the reporting period; however, CIDI called for more Government action against anti-Semitic Internet sites, describing the Internet as one of the main sources for dissemination of anti-Semitic and racist ideologies. On March 1, 2007, the Government opened a new cybercrime Web site through which citizens can report radical statements and hate e-mail.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Muslims faced continuing societal resentment, attributable to growing perceptions that Islam is incompatible with Western values, that Muslim immigrants have failed to integrate, and that levels of criminal activity among Muslim youth are higher than the national average. Major incidents of violence against Muslims were rare; however, minor incidents, including intimidation, brawls, vandalism, and graffiti with abusive texts were quite common. Expanding pockets of young Muslims and youths identifying themselves as "native Dutch" were responsible for most instances of violence. A number of offenders were arrested, prosecuted, and convicted.

A number of outspoken politicians, mainly from the right, openly argued that Islam is incompatible with Dutch traditions and social values. Geert Wilders, whose Party of Freedom (PVV) won nine seats in the November 2006 general elections on an anti-immigrant and anti-Islam ticket, was the most prominent of several politicians seen as encouraging public opinion against Muslims by claiming that Islam preaches violence and hatred.

It is a crime to engage in public speech that incites religious, racial, or ethnic hatred, and the Government prosecuted several cases during the reporting period. The Government continued a comprehensive outreach campaign to counter anti-Muslim sentiments, stressing that the majority of Muslims fit comfortably into Dutch society. At the same time, the Government made clear that it would combat groups espousing violence in support of an extremist Islamic agenda. These efforts raised public awareness and triggered debate, but concerns about the policy's effectiveness remained.

Government and nongovernmental organizations cooperated to combat discrimination and promote dialogue and mutual understanding. The Ministry of Education reminded schools of longstanding guidelines prescribing the teaching of different religions and ideologies in conjunction with combating discrimination and intolerance. The Ministry of Welfare subsidized a special program to teach children about World War II and the persecution of Jews.

The Government regularly told prosecutors and the police to give proper attention to incidents of discrimination. The Government also took measures to deal more effectively with incitement to discrimination on the Internet. Despite these measures, critics claimed that law enforcement agencies did not give sufficient priority to instances of discrimination, and prosecutions and convictions remained rare.

The labor federations worked to include stipulations in collective bargaining agreements that permit non-Christian employees to take leave on non-Christian holy days. Such stipulations were included in most agreements.

SECTION IV. U.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 addition, it continued to engage in dialogue with all major religious groups.

NORWAY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, the state church, enjoys some benefits not available to other religious groups.

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

There were very few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 150,000 square miles and a population of 4.6 million. Citizens are considered to be members of the state church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, unless they explicitly note otherwise. For example, citizens may elect to associate themselves with another denomination, nonreligious organization (e.g., the Norwegian Humanist Association), or no religious affiliation at all. An estimated 85 percent of the population (3.9 million persons) nominally belongs to the state church. However, actual church attendance is quite low.

Other religious groups operate freely and include various Protestant Christian denominations (129,761 members), Muslims (72,023), and Roman Catholics (46,440). Buddhists, Jews, Orthodox Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus are present in very small numbers, together comprising less than 1 percent of the population. The Norwegian Humanist Association—the only national organization for those who did not formally practice any religion, including atheists—has 76,470 registered members. The Government estimated that an additional 6.7 percent of the population (approximately 252,000 persons) does not formally practice religion.

The majority of European and American immigrants, who make up approximately half of the foreign-born population, are either Christian or nonreligious, with the exception of Muslim refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Most non-Western immigrants practice Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, or Hinduism. Foreign missionaries and other religious workers operate freely.

Of religious minority members, 42 percent are concentrated in the Oslo metropolitan area, including 76 percent of Muslims and most of the Buddhist community.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway is the state church. The state supports it financially, and there is a constitutional requirement that the King and at least one-half of the cabinet belong to this church.

On January 1, 2006, the Government established an Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman and an Anti-Discrimination Tribunal to deal with such human rights issues. In March 2007 the Ombudsman began evaluating a case involving the Church of Norway's bishop in Oslo, who publicly refused to admit gay priests into the diocese. The bishop's refusal of one applicant was brought before the Oslo Diocese Council and overturned. By the end of the reporting period, the Ombudsman had not rendered a decision on the matter. During the reporting period, political parties and the media extensively debated the issue.

On March 14, 2006, the U.N. Human Rights Committee voiced concern that a section of the Constitution is incompatible with article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). That section concerns the constitutional provision that individuals professing the Evangelical Lutheran religion must raise their children in that faith.

Church officials and some politicians spoke in favor of greater separation in the state-church relationship. In 2003 the Government appointed an official State-Church Commission to review the future of the state-church relationship. The commission's purpose was to ascertain whether the state-church system should be maintained, reformed, or discontinued. The commission had its own secretariat and included members from several areas of society, including different church groups and other religious groups, politicians, legal experts, and the Sami people.

On January 31, 2006, the commission presented its assessment. Most members recommended that the existing state-church system be abolished. The *Storting* (Parliament) was expected to make a final decision in 2008, based upon the commission's assessment.

A religious community must register with the Government only if it desires state support, which is provided to all registered denominations in proportion to their membership.

There are no special licensing or registration requirements for foreign religious workers. Such workers are subject to the same visa and work permit requirements as other foreign workers. The Anti-Discrimination Act is viewed as another legislative means to improve the protection and promotion of human rights recognized under the ICCPR. The act (which passed in Parliament in June 2005) is intended to strengthen protections against ethnic discrimination. Specifically, the act incorporates provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The act forbids unequal treatment on the basis of religion and belief (in addition to ethnicity, national origin, and skin color) and applies to all areas of society. The law forbids direct discrimination; an employer can neither hire nor reject a potential employee based upon that person's origin. The law also protects employees against indirect discrimination. For example, an employer cannot completely prohibit the wearing of hijabs, since such exclusion would theoretically prohibit women from wearing hijabs for religious reasons.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

A 1997 law introduced the Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information (CKREE) course for grades 1 through 10 (ages 6 to 16). The CKREE reviews world religions and philosophy while promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs. Citing the country's Christian history (and given the stated importance of Christianity to society), the CKREE devotes an extensive amount of time to studying Christianity. This class is mandatory, without any exceptions for children of other religious groups. On special grounds, students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts, such as church services or prayer, but they cannot forgo religious instruction.

Organizations for atheists, as well as Muslim communities, have contested the legality of forced religious teaching, claiming that it is a breach of freedom of religion and parents' right to provide religious instruction to their children. In 2002 the humanist association appealed the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). In November 2004 the UNHRC decided that the requirement of a mandatory religion class violated article 18 of the ICCPR and stated that the law violated parents' right to determine their children's religious and moral upbringing. In response, the Government gave parents the right to exempt their children from the CKREE until August 2005 (when a new curriculum was implemented). In December 2006 the ECHR reviewed the case. In a verdict rendered on June 29, 2007, the ECHR held in a near-split decision that article 2 of the European Human Rights Convention's Protocol No. 1 was violated. In reply the Minister of Education stated that the verdict would be evaluated, the Government would determine whether additional CKREE course amendments would be introduced, and that the case would not be appealed.

Under the new curriculum, Christianity, as the state religion, continued to receive a larger percentage of the class's teaching time than other religious groups. The final law states that children cannot receive complete class exemption. Limited exemptions may occur with respect to specific classroom activities, such as hymn singing or public prayer.

The humanist association did not support the curriculum changes. The association asserted in a letter to the UNHRC that the CKREE curriculum revisions were only cosmetic and did not create a religion and belief-neutral class. In addition the association advocated that the partial exemption right be expanded. The association claimed that the UNHRC concerns had not been heeded and the CKREE curriculum, as revised, continued to violate Article 18 of the ICCPR.

During March 2006 a mosque in the city of Bergen was required to close its temporary premises due to building code violations. The Muslim community planned on relocating to a permanent location, which had not been fully constructed. The mosque community planned to protest the eviction by holding a prayer vigil in a public square. A representative of a small political party opposed the vigil and threatened to place pig ears around the square and taunt vigil attendees with pig noises. This proposed act raised widespread public protest. Neither the vigil nor the planned protest took place. The city of Bergen paid approximately US$26,600

(160,000 Norwegian kroner) to address the building code violations and stated that the mosque could remain at its temporary location until the end of 2007.

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 institution's or religion's beliefs and principles.

In 2006 the city of Oslo recommended banning the wearing of burqas and nikabs in schools. The city sent its recommendation to the Ministry of Education and Research to determine necessary changes to existing laws to implement such a ban in the 2006–07 school year. In February 2007 the Ministry encouraged schools to ban the use of nikabs, while emphasizing that no legislation on the issue would be forthcoming. Every school would be allowed to independently determine whether to implement such a ban. During the reporting period, there were no public reports that any school implemented such a ban.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish population is relatively small, with about 1,000 members. There was an increase in the number of reports of anti-Semitic incidents during the reporting period. There were several incidents of vandalism of Jewish cultural property (synagogues and cemeteries). On July 15, 2006, in Oslo three men physically attacked and verbally abused a Jewish citizen. Around the same time, the Jewish community reported threatening phone calls and e-mails. On July 19, 2006, a man defecated on the stairs of a synagogue and then threw stones at it, causing minor damage, including two broken windows. At the end of the reporting period, there were no arrests in either the assault case or the act of vandalism.

On September 17, 2006, automatic weapon fire hit the synagogue in Oslo, causing minor damage and igniting a nationwide debate on the rising level of anti-Semitism. The police arrested four men in the attack; law enforcement authorities released three of the suspects on their own recognizance, while one remained in custody pending trial at the end of the reporting period. Police believe the shooting may have been in part a protest of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict. Following the attack, an imam visited the synagogue and denounced the shooting.

Articles, reports, and political cartoons appeared in the media that vilified and demeaned the Jewish people and community and minimized the Holocaust, particularly during the July–August 2006 conflict involving Israel and the terrorist organization Hizballah in Lebanon. One caricature appearing in a major Oslo newspaper showed Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as a Nazi concentration camp commander. Jostein Gaarder, a prominent Norwegian author, published an article entitled "God's Chosen People," that many within and outside the country considered anti-Semitic for its tone and biblical interpretations.

The country is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. In 2003 the Government instituted annual observance of Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27 in schools nationwide, as part of a National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination. In addition, according to the Oslo-based Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities, the curriculum of the CKREE class included teaching high school students about the deportation and extermination of the country's Jews from 1942 to 1945.

In August 2006 the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities opened an exhibition and research center in Villa Grande, Nazi collaborator Vidkun Quisling's World War II-era residence. The center focuses on new research, education, and information-sharing activities, such as sponsoring exhibitions and conferences in the areas of religious, ethnic, or racially motivated discrimination and violence.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no public reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, beyond the anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents mentioned in this report. A Cooperation Council for Faith and Secular Society included the state church and other religious communities, among them the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and secular humanist communities. The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs facilitated closer coordination and international cooperation on reli-

gious freedom issues and supported projects in China, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Indonesia that developed contacts, fostered dialogue on interreligious understanding, and established nongovernmental organizations with representatives from different religious groups. The Ecumenical Council of Christian Communities promoted cooperation within the Christian community. During the past several years, various religious communities cooperated on human rights issues. Bilateral dialogue between the state church and the Muslim and Jewish communities generated statements in support of minority rights and other human 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. The U.S. Embassy regularly sponsored speakers and events to highlight religious freedom. The Embassy sponsored a leading authority on American philosopher Hannah Arendt to lecture at the Holocaust Center in Oslo in October 2006 in support of the center's commemoration of the centenary of Arendt's birth. The event provided an opportunity for scholars to discuss links between Arendt's philosophies and the destructive impact of religious intolerance, particularly within the context of anti-Semitism.

Also during the reporting period, the Embassy hosted an interfaith/Thanksgiving dinner for leaders of Oslo's diverse faith communities. Attendees included representatives from the city's Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, Mormon, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist communities. The dinner provided an opportunity to promote religious dialogue. On March 28, 2007, Embassy officials met with the Islamic Council to discuss religious freedom in the country. During the reporting period, Embassy officials also met with other religious communities.

POLAND

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

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. There were occasional desecrations of Jewish and Roman Catholic cemeteries by skinheads and other marginal elements of society. Anti-Semitic sentiment persisted among some elements of society and among certain prominent political figures. However, the Government publicly denounced anti-Semitic acts.

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 monitored threats to religious freedom and seek further resolution of unsettled legacies of the Holocaust and the Communist era.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 120,725 square miles and a population of 39 million.

More than 96 percent of citizens are Roman Catholic. According to the 2006 Annual Statistical Yearbook of Poland, which uses figures from the 2004 census, the following figures represent the formal membership of the listed religious groups, but not the actual number of persons in those religious communities. For example, the actual number of Jews was estimated at between 30,000 and 40,000, while the formal membership of the Union of Jewish Communities totaled only 2,500. The number of Jews is slowly rising, due primarily to the increase of individuals acknowledging their previously hidden or unknown Jewish heritage.

The yearbook estimated that in 2004, less than 2 percent of the population was constituted by Orthodox Church members, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans (Augsburg Confession), Greek Catholics, Old Catholic Mariavits, Pentecostals, members of the Polish Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventists, members of the New Apostolic Church, Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans (Reformed), and members of the Church of Christ. There were very small communities of the Union of Jewish Communities, Catholic Mariavits, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Hare Krishnas, and Muslims.

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 Apos-

tolic Church, the Church of Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna), and the Church of Christ.

A May 2006 public opinion poll indicated that approximately 56 percent of citizens participated in religious ceremonies at least once per week, 19 percent once or twice per month, and 17 percent attended sporadically. Eight percent declared they had no contact with the Roman Catholic Church, and 3 percent declared themselves nonbelievers.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Criminal Code stipulates that offending religious sentiment through public speech is punishable by a fine or up to a 3-year prison term.

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 146 other registered religious groups that do not have a statutorily defined relationship with the state. All registered religious groups, including the original 15, enjoy equal protection under the law, and there were no reports of serious conflicts among churches or religious groups.

Religious communities may register with the Ministry of the Interior; however, they are not required to do so and may function freely without registration. The 1989 Law on Guaranteeing Freedom of Conscience and Belief requires that in order to register, a group submit the names of at least 100 members as well as other information. Information on membership must be confirmed by a notary public, although the registration itself often appears to be a formality. All registered religious groups receive 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 governmental 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. There were no reports that missionaries were denied entry.

The Constitution gives parents the right to bring up their children in compliance with their own religious and philosophical beliefs. Religious education classes continue to be taught in the public schools at public expense. Children have a choice between religious instruction and ethics. Although Catholic Church representatives teach the vast majority of these religious classes, parents may request such classes in any of the legally registered religions. While not common, such non-Catholic religious instruction exists, and the Ministry of Education pays the instructors. Religious education instructors, including clergy, receive salaries from the state for teaching religion in public schools. Catholic Church representatives are included on a commission that determines whether books qualify for school use.

Catholic holy days (Easter Monday, Corpus Christi Day, Assumption of the Virgin Mary, All Saints' Day, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day) are national holidays.

In 1998, the Concordat, a treaty signed in 1993 regulating relations between the Government and the Vatican, was ratified by Parliament, signed by the President, and took effect. The parliamentary vote came after years of bitter disputes between Concordat supporters and opponents. The debate centered on whether the treaty ensured the Catholic Church's right to guarantee freedom of religion for its congregants or blurred the line between church and state. The Government and the Catholic Church participate at the highest levels in a Joint Government-Episcopate Task Force, which meets regularly to discuss church-state relations.

The Government continues to work with both local and international religious groups to address property claims and other sensitive issues stemming from Nazi- and Communist-era confiscations and persecutions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is largely responsible for coordinating relations between the Government and these international organizations, although the President also plays an important role. The Government cooperates effectively with a variety of international organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, for the preservation of historic sites, in-

cluding cemeteries and houses of worship. However, contentious issues regarding property restitution and preservation of historic religious sites and cemeteries remained only partially settled.

Progress continued in implementing the laws that permit local religious communities to submit claims for property owned prior to World War II that subsequently was nationalized. The Catholic and Orthodox churches reported general satisfaction with Government action to restitute property. A 1997 law, which mirrors previous 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 religious group, for the return of synagogues, cemeteries, and community headquarters, as well as buildings that were used for other religious, educational, or charitable activities. The law included time limits for filing claims; these deadlines expired in recent years, and no additional claims may be filed. However, restitution commissions composed of representatives of the Government and the Jewish community were continuing adjudication of previously filed claims.

Claims by the Jewish community totaled 5,544. By the end of 2006 the commission had concluded 1,143 cases, of which 316 were settled amicably and 336 properties were restored. The remaining cases were still being processed.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other observers criticized the generally slow pace of restitution of Jewish communal property and noted reluctance by the Government to return valuable properties in some cases. In contrast, restitution of Jewish communal property appeared to be progressing well in cities where it had the support of the local governments, such as Warsaw and Lodz.

Of approximately 10,000 communal property claims filed for restitution of religious property by all religious communities, more than 5,000 were resolved, with more than 1,200 properties returned by the end of 2006.

At the end of 2006, 2,959 of the 3,063 claims filed by the Catholic Church had been concluded, with 1,420 claims settled by agreement between the Church and the party in possession of the property (usually the national or a local government); 932 properties returned through decision of the commission on property restitution, which rules on disputed claims; and 632 claims rejected by the commission.

The Lutheran Church, for which the filing deadline was 1996, filed claims for 1,200 properties. Of these, 842 cases were heard, 228 of which were resolved amicably and 136 of which were restored.

A total of 486 claims were filed with the commission by the Orthodox Church, of which 215 were closed in full or in part.

The laws on communal property restitution do not address the issue of communal properties to which private third parties had title, leaving several controversial and complicated cases unresolved. In a number of cases, buildings and residences were built on land that included Jewish cemeteries destroyed during or after World War II.

There was some progress during the reporting period on adoption by Parliament of long-awaited legislation that would govern the restitution of private property. Parliament made several attempts to enact such legislation and passed a law in early 2001, but the President vetoed it because of its budgetary implications and because it was discriminatory. The legislation imposed a citizenship requirement that would have made most American citizens ineligible to file a claim. Some claimants for such restitution successfully regained title to their property in local courts. While approximately 500 claims totaling $183 million have been settled over the past 10 years, the treasury estimated that 56,000 claims valued at approximately $16.7 billion remained outstanding. The lack of legislation in this area affected individuals of many religious groups seeking restitution or compensation for property confiscated during and after World War II.

The international Jewish Claims Conference held its annual meeting in Warsaw in February 2007 to press for urgent passage of a private property restitution law with more lenient filing requirements. The group met with high level officials, including the Prime Minister, who made his first statement in support of compensation for private property stolen by the Nazis and the Communist regime. The proposal the Prime Minister has backed would provide 15 percent of the current value of property, a figure some in the claims conference indicated was too low.

The Government cooperates with local 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, and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In 2001 the Government established a department within the Ministry of Interior to monitor the activities of "new religious groups" and "cults." In April 2002, the Government closed the department; however, an employee of the Interior Ministry's Public Order Department continued to monitor religious groups.

Although the Constitution provides for the separation of religion and state, crucifixes hang in both the upper and lower houses of Parliament, as well as in many other public buildings, including public schools.

In September 2006, the Salvation Army won its appeal to register as a religious group. The Ministry of Interior had denied the application for technical reasons in April 2006.

Public radio and television stations broadcast Catholic Mass with licensure from the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Council.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

European Parliament representative Maciej Giertych's pamphlet published in February 2007 criticizing the Jewish community (see Anti-Semitism section) declared that much of public life in the Islamic world was "despotic" and that few Muslims knew the Qur'an.

Roman Giertych, son of Maciej, is Chairman of the conservative Catholic League of Polish Families (LPR), which was formerly affiliated with the nationalist youth organization All-Polish Youth (MW). Giertych has been a Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education since May 2006. MW draws from traditions of extreme nationalism and anti-Semitism and recruits its members from among skinheads.

In January 2006 EU Parliamentarian Marcin Libick, a member of the right-wing Law and Justice party, demanded the destruction of Poznan's historic synagogue. He claimed the synagogue was unsightly and derided its presence as anti-Polish and anti-Catholic. The building is widely regarded as an architectural treasure, and there are plans to renovate it and convert it into a Tolerance Centre with the support of the European Union. Libick also applied to the Polish public prosecutor for legal action to be taken against the Web site of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Los Angeles for alleged "anti-Polish" content in its presentation of WWII history. Libick is known for his opposition to the restitution of property to former Jewish owners and is viewed as an extremist. Conversely, other members of the Law and Justice party made efforts to forge good ties with the Polish Jewish community.

In November 2005 the Government prohibited and violently dispersed an anti-discrimination march in Poznan.

The state owned company Ruch continued to distribute anti-Semitic materials up through at least 2005.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism persisted among certain sectors of the population. Isolated incidents of harassment and violence against Jews continued to occur, almost always linked to skinheads and other marginal societal groups. Among certain sectors of the population the term "Jew" is a common slur, and at football (soccer) games, fans routinely call each other 'Jews as a term of abuse. During the Jewish Claims Conference's annual meeting in Warsaw in February, 2007, groups of up to 15 individuals protested the conference with signs such as "Don't give Poland back to the Jews," and "This is Poland, not Israel."

The All-Polish Youth (MW), national Rebirth of Poland (NOP), the Polish National Party (PPN), and several other organizations were known to harbor anti-Semitic views.

In August 2006 the Prime Minister denied that anti-Semitism was rising, and many local Jewish leaders agree. However, concerns remain about anti-Semitic statements made by members of the ruling coalition (notably by members of the League of Polish Families), and the influence of Radio Maryja, a conservative Catholic radio station that critics state tolerates, and in some case promotes, anti-Semitic views.

There were more than 500 racist and xenophobic Web sites in the country, according to Never Again, an antiracism organization. Occasional cases of cemetery dese-

cration, including both Jewish and Catholic sites, also occurred during the period covered by this report.

In the fall of 2006, Poland installed its first Polish-born rabbi since the end of the Communist regime. Three other rabbis came to work in the country in 2006, increasing the number of rabbis from three to seven.

On June 26, 2007, the President attended groundbreaking ceremonies for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

On March 4, 2007, *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported that the skinhead Web site "Redwatch" posted photos and names of teachers and students in Zabrze and called them "traitors to their race" for cleaning and maintaining a Jewish cemetery. This event followed the May 16, 2006 knife attack by skinheads allegedly from the same group against a journalist identified as an "enemy of the white people." The group is affiliated with the white supremacist group Blood and Honor. On July 5, 2006, authorities arrested the Web site's administrator and charged him with disseminating Nazi ideas, xenophobia, and participating in an illegal group. The Web site, which was hosted on a U.S.-based server, was shut down soon after the attack as a result of U.S.-Polish action but was reestablished on another server.

On February 15, 2007, European Parliament Deputy and former head of the League of Polish Families Maciej Giertych published a booklet bearing the EU Parliament logo that suggested that Jews are unethical, obsessed with separateness, and a "tragic community" because they do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. The 32-page brochure furthermore stated that Jews "create their own ghettos" because they like to separate themselves from others. The book is devoted to proving that European culture, education and morality should be the province of only one civilization, based on Christianity; Jews are presented as detrimental to this goal. The Polish President, Lech Kaczynski, condemned the publication.

On January 31, 2007, Deputy Prime Minister Andrzej Lepper was awarded an honorary professorship at MAUP, a private Ukrainian university which is openly anti-Semitic. The Anti-Defamation League immediately condemned Lepper, who also received an honorary doctorate from the institution in 2004.

On December 7, 2006, a court in Bialystok ordered Leszek Bubel, a self-proclaimed anti-Semite and leader of the Polish National Party, to undergo a psychiatric evaluation. The case stemmed from charges brought by the local prosecutor in 2005 for an article Bubel published, "The Polish-Jewish War Over Crosses," for which the court sentenced Bubel to 6 months in prison and a fine of $825 (2,500 zloty) for inciting hostility and slandering Jews.

In August 2006 unknown persons vandalized 15 Jewish tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Czeladz (Silesia). The vandals toppled the tombstones, breaking some of them. The police treated the incident as an act of vandalism because the perpetrators did not leave anti-Semitic graffiti.

On August 4, 2006, a court gave a 2-year suspended sentence to a man for attacking and insulting the country's chief rabbi in May 2006. The court convicted and fined the defendant $1,300 (4,000 zlotys) for using violence and racially motivated hate speech. President Kaczynski and other leaders strongly condemned the incident and said they would not tolerate anti-Jewish crimes.

In late summer 2006 prosecutors dropped an anti-Semitism case against Radio Maryja in which one of its commentators labeled restitution efforts by Jewish citizens as extortion and belittled the Holocaust. Prosecutors decided that the commentator had not broken Polish laws banning Holocaust denial or insulting Jews, though he had questioned the existence of two well-known World War II-era massacres of Jews, Jedwabne and Kielce. After the case was dropped, the public broadcasting station Polish National Radio hired the defendant as a commentator.

In May 2006 a government coalition was formed by the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) with the leaders of the League of Polish Families (LPR) and the Self Defense Party (SO). LPR's participation in the Government and the appointment of LPR Chairman Roman Giertych as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education sparked controversy amongst international Jewish groups, including the Anti-Defamation League, because of Giertych's ties to the All-Poland Youth League, a group which has long been perceived as Anti-Semitic. In the wake of protests, the responsibility for Holocaust memorial programs was removed from the Education Ministry and is now overseen by a Secretary of State in the Prime Minister's Chancellery. According to a May 2007 survey by the Anti-Defamation League, 29 percent of Poles believe the LPR to be Anti-Semitic.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There were sporadic attacks and discrimination against Jewish properties and persons (see anti-Semitism section).

Some individuals publicly expressed 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. Newspapers and magazines published articles during the reporting period concerning the arrival of Scientologists in the country. In April 2007 the newspaper *Dziennik* published a series of articles which criticized the Church of Scientology as a "dangerous sect."

Interfaith groups worked to bring together the various religious groups in the country. The Polish Council of Christians and Jews met regularly to discuss issues of mutual interest, and the Catholic and Orthodox churches had an active bilateral commission. The Polish Ecumenical Council, a group that includes most religious groups other than the Roman Catholic Church, was also active. Approximately 250 Greek Catholic churches were taken over by Roman Catholic dioceses after World War II, and Greek Catholics were working to have those properties returned. This was an internal issue between the Greek and Roman Catholic dioceses, mediated by the Pope, which did not involve 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. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate General Krakow regularly monitor issues relating to religious freedom and interfaith relations, including ethnic-Polish-Jewish relations. Embassy and consulate officers met frequently with a wide range of representatives of religious communities, the Government, and local authorities on such matters as religious freedom, property restitution, religious harassment, and interfaith cooperation. The Embassy and Consulate General actively urged the protection and return of former Jewish cemeteries throughout the country, and urged the Government and Parliament to enact private property restitution legislation. U.S. Government officials cooperated with Polish police officials in shutting down the skinhead Web site "Redwatch" and raised concerns about anti-Semitic associations of some officials.

Embassy and consulate representatives, including the Ambassador, regularly met with representatives of major religious communities, including leaders of the Jewish community, to discuss religious freedom. The U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism and Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met in Warsaw and Krakow with Government and community officials. Consulate officials routinely attended commemorations at Auschwitz honoring the Jews, Roma, ethnic Poles, and others killed there. They also monitored developments regarding historical sites related to the Holocaust, supported efforts at commemoration and youth education, and facilitated official visits to the Auschwitz Museum, located near Krakow. Embassy and consulate officers also remained in contact with and attended events associated with the Orthodox, Protestant, and Muslim minorities.

The Embassy and Consulate continued to support activities to promote cultural and religious tolerance, including press and public affairs support for the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation's education project in Oswiecim, financial support for teacher training in Holocaust education, and visits by U.S. officials to schools to speak on tolerance and human rights as part of the Anne Frank House's "Free2Choose" program. The majority of events conducted the U.S. "Partnership for Democracy" program (formerly called "Bridges to the East") featured nonviolence and tolerance as integral parts of the presentations.

PORTUGAL

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 35,672 square miles and a population (as of January 2007) of 10.6 million. More than 80 percent of the population above the age of 12 identifies with the Roman Catholic Church; however, a large percentage states that it does not actively participate in church activities. Approximately 4 percent identifies with various Protestant denominations (including 250,000 evangelicals), and 1 percent with non-Christian religious groups. Less than 3 percent state that they have no religion.

Practitioners of non-Christian religions include 35,000 Muslims (largely from sub-Saharan Lusophone Africa and South Asia), 700 Jews, and a very small population of Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. There is also a Hindu community of approximately 7,000 persons, which largely traces its origins to South Asians who emigrated from Lusophone Africa and from the former colony of Goa in India. Many of these minority communities are not formally organized.

Government estimates suggest that there are more than 200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe in the country. More than 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 (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), a proselytizing church that originated in Brazil, also practices in the country. The Church of Scientology has approximately 200 active members, primarily in the Lisbon area.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 2001 Religious Freedom Act created a legislative framework for religious groups established in the country for at least 30 years or those recognized internationally for at least 60 years. The act provides qualifying religious groups with benefits previously reserved for the Catholic Church: full tax-exempt status, legal recognition for marriage and other rites, chaplain visits to prisons and hospitals, and respect for traditional holidays. It allows each religion to negotiate its own concordat-style agreement with the Government, although it does not ensure the acceptance of any such agreements. In 2003 the Government enacted rules governing the commission that oversees the act's implementation. In 2004 procedures were published in the national gazette, *Diario da Republica*, on how to register religious entities.

The Catholic Church maintains a separate agreement with the Government under the terms of the 1940 Concordat as amended in 2004 to comply with the 2001 Religious Freedom Act. The concordat recognized for the first time the juridical personality of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference. It also allows the Catholic Church to receive 0.5 percent of the income tax that citizens can allocate to various institutions in their annual tax returns.

Public secondary school curriculums include an optional course called "Religion and Morals." This course functions as a survey of world religious groups and is taught by laypersons. It can be used to give instruction on the Catholic religion, although the Catholic Church must approve all teachers for this course. Other religious groups can set up such a course if they have 10 or more children of that religion in the particular school. For example, the Evangelical Alliance held 263 classes in schools during the 2005–06 school year. Under the 2001 Religious Freedom Act, representatives from each religious group may approve the course's respective instructors.

The Government established the Working Group for Interreligious Dialogue, which promotes 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 group is led by a Government-appointed chairman and consists

primarily of teachers who, by the nature of their jobs, have professional experience in this area.

Under the concordat, major Catholic holy days also are official holidays, of which there are 7 of the country's 16 national holidays.

The Diocese of Leiria-Fatima broadcasts national Catholic programming through the Brazilian Catholic Television network Cancao Nova.

The Government takes active steps to promote interfaith understanding. Most notably, 5 days a week the state television channel (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 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 religious groups. The Evangelical Alliance receives two 7.5-minute segments per week, while other participating religious groups receive approximately one 7.5-minute segment per month. The Catholic Church has a program of its own called *70x7*, while other religious groups work together to schedule programming on the *Caminhos* ("Paths") broadcast every Sunday morning.

The Lisbon municipal government provided matching funds for the July 2006 completion of the city's mosque. In 2004 the municipality provided matching funds for the restoration of Lisbon's 19th-century synagogue, considered a building of historic significance and still used by the Jewish community for religious services and cultural events. The municipality of Lisbon also provided opportunities 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, chaplaincies for the military, prisons, and hospitals remain state-funded positions for Catholics only. In April 2007 the Health Ministry drew up and passed to the Government's Religious Freedom Committee (CLR), a bill proposal that would grant all non-Catholic hospital patients equal access to religious services in an interdenominational place of worship and to an interdenominational chaplain in hospitals. This proposal was cleared and returned to the Health Ministry on April 12, 2007, for final approval by the Government.

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 were concerned that exclusion from the benefits accorded under the act might 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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

A number of Government initiatives during the period covered by this report focused on the promotion of religious tolerance. On June 28, 2007, the Government approved legislation that allows religious groups established in the country for at least 30 years to perform marriages with equivalent legal status as civilian ceremonies. Religious groups such as Jews, Muslims, Baha'is, Evangelicals, and Adventists may now marry legally within their own religious communities without having to register in the Civil Registry. Previously, only Catholic marriages were automatically recognized as legal. Also on June 28, 2007, the Government appointed former president, and staunch agnostic, Mario Soares, chairman of the CLR, the first time the Government chose a non-Catholic for this position. On March 16–17, 2007, the CLR sponsored a conference on religious tolerance titled "Religion Outside of Places of Worship" at the Ismaili Center in Lisbon. This conference was attended by leaders of the major religious communities in the country.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Participation among the various religious groups in crafting the programming schedule for *A Fe dos Homens* facilitated greater understanding and enhanced mutual respect. Many communities conducted "open houses" or sponsored interfaith education seminars.

There were no reported cases of verbal or physical attacks against Jewish persons or property during the period covered by this report.

The European Commission on Racism and Intolerance issued its third report on the country in June 2006 and found little religious intolerance, Islamophobia, or anti-Semitism to report, but room for improvement in the treatment of the Roma, whose religious beliefs were not mentioned. On November 27, 2006, the European Union's Monitoring Center (EUMC) report on Muslims in the EU confirmed that Muslims did not perceive difficulties in integrating into society.

The residents of the Azores and Madeira archipelagos, although traditionally Catholic, are also quite tolerant of other religious groups. Missionaries, active on the islands, are well treated and participate in social life.

SECTION IV. U.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. representatives have continuing contacts with leaders of the country's religious communities, including the Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim communities. The U.S. Embassy hosted several events to promote religious freedom and tolerance. On October 19, 2006, the Ambassador hosted an iftar celebration at his residence for Muslim ambassadors and leaders in the Islamic community to show support for tolerance and religious freedom. Ambassadors from Iraq, Pakistan, Morocco, and Tunisia were in attendance, along with the head of the Ismaili Community and the chairman of the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal.

ROMANIA

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion. While the Government generally respected this right in practice, some restrictions adversely affected the rights of many religious groups. Minority religious groups also continued to claim, credibly, that low-level Government officials impeded their efforts at proselytizing and interfered with other religious activities.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to differentiate between recognized and unrecognized religious groups, and registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religious groups. Parliament passed a new law on religious freedom in December 2006 that took effect in January 2007. Many domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and religious groups criticized the law, arguing that it would institutionalize discrimination against many religious minorities and create impediments for many such groups to obtain official recognition as a religion. The Government did not return property to the Greek Catholic community that was transferred by the Communists to the Orthodox Church in 1948. The Greek Catholic Church was the only denomination dismantled under Communist rule and whose churches were confiscated and given to another denomination, the Orthodox Church. This dismantling led to a particularly discriminatory situation for the Greek Catholic Church, which continued during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to make progress in recognizing the history of the Holocaust in the country. Some minority religious groups continued to allege that local authorities created delays in granting construction permits based upon religion.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. There were incidents in which the Romanian Orthodox Church showed hostility toward non-Orthodox churches and criticized the proselytizing of Protestant and other religious groups. In general, the Orthodox Church continued to refuse to return the Greek Catholic churches that it received in 1948. The Orthodox Church often used its influence to put pressure on small groups and Government officials to its own advantage.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Through 2006 the U.S. Embassy regularly expressed concern about discriminatory components of the draft law on religion, including with presidential advisors, Members of Parliament, and the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs. The Embassy also continued to raise concerns with officials about the failure of the Government to ensure the full restitution of religious properties, including Greek Catholic churches. The Embassy also strongly supported the Government's efforts to recognize the true history of the Holocaust in Romania, including the implementation of the recommendations in the 2004 Wiesel Commission report, the training of teachers to teach the history of the Holocaust in the country, and the commemoration of the country's Holocaust Remembrance Day.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 91,699 square miles and a population of 21.7 million.

According to the 2002 census, Romanian Orthodox believers (including the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara) comprised 86.8 percent of the population. Roman Catholics made up 4.7 percent of the population, and Greek Catholics were less than 1 percent, although, according to a recent estimation of the Greek Catholic Church, its adherents comprised about 3.6 percent of the population. The following religious groups comprised less than 2 percent of the population: Old Rite Christian (Orthodox) Church, Protestant Reformed Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustinian Church, Lutheran Evangelical Church Synod-Presbyterian, Unitarian Church of Romania, Baptist Church, Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church), Seventh-day Christian Adventist Church, Armenian Church, Jews, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, 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. According to the 2002 census, the number of atheists was 8,524, and there were 12,825 persons who did not have any religious affiliation.

Most religious groups 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. Most Greek Catholics reside in Transylvania, but there are also Greek Catholics in Bucharest and the Banat and Crisana regions. Protestant and Catholic believers tend to be in Transylvania, but many also are located around Bacau. Orthodox or Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians live mostly in the northwestern part of the country. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are primarily in Banat. Armenians are concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Members of the Protestant Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Unitarian churches from Transylvania are virtually all ethnic Hungarians.

Approximately 40 percent of the population claimed to attend religious services once or several times a month, according to a November 2006 poll.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion, the Government exercises considerable influence over religious life through laws and decrees. Government registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religious groups.

The total number of officially recognized religions remained low. Until December 2006 there were 18 recognized religions, and the Government registered other religious groups as religious associations or foundations under a law on associations, a status which did not guarantee the same rights as a recognized religion. The Government has refused to grant religion status to a number of religious groups since 1990, including the Organization of the Orthodox Believers of Old Rite, the Baha'i Faith, and the Mormons, primarily because of the absence of legislation.

Under the provisions of the new religion law passed December 27, 2006, the Government implemented a three-tier system of recognition: religious groups (which are not legal entities), religious associations, and religions. Religious groups are groups of people who share the same faith but do not receive tax exemptions or support from the state. Religious associations are legal entities that do not receive Government funding, must be registered as such in a religious association registry, and are exempted from taxes only for places of worship. Unrecognized groups are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities. In order to register, religious associa-

tions must have 300 citizen members and must submit members' personal data. Under the law on associations, the membership requirement for registration of any other type of association is three members. Religious associations are entitled to receive religion status if they have 12 years of continuous religious activity and a membership of 0.1 percent of the Romanian population (approximately 22,000 persons).

The new religion law recognizes the same 18 religions: the Romanian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, Old Rite Christian (Orthodox) Church, Reformed (Protestant) Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustinian Church, Lutheran Evangelical Church-Synod Presbyterian, Unitarian Church, Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Church, Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Recognized religions are eligible for state support according to their representation in the census, plus they have the right to establish schools, teach religion in public schools where they have a number of adherents, 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, have cemeteries, and enjoy tax-exempt status. The 18 religions have 1 year from the implementation of the new religion law to submit their documents in order to have their official status reconfirmed by the state.

The law entitles religious communities to bury without restriction their believers in the cemeteries of other religions in localities where they do not have their own cemetery and there are no communal cemeteries.

NGOs, the National Anti-Discrimination Council (CNCD), and religious groups expressed concern that a provision forbidding religious defamation and hatred, as well as the public offense to religious symbols, might infringe on freedom of speech and religion. The law forbids public authorities from asking individuals to specify their religious affiliation for any reason related to their interactions with the state.

Under the religion law, the state-provided budget is determined by the number of adherents of each recognized religion in the most recent census and "the religion's needs" (a rather ambiguous provision). The Government had not issued the implementing rules and regulations for the new religion law. Consequently, its implementation had not started by the end of the reporting period. Some minority religious groups, such as the Greek Catholics, claimed that the census undercounts members of their community significantly, as Romanian ethnicity is commonly perceived as determining an individual's religion as Orthodox.

In 2005 the Government amended the property restitution legislation, including law 501/2002, which provides for the restitution of religious property. This law also covers the restitution of farm and forest land and other real estate to ethnic communities and addresses restitution to religious groups. The amendments aimed at expediting restitution, clarified and simplified the procedures for property restitution, broadened the scope of restitution to include land of demolished buildings, and extended the application deadlines by 6 months.

The law also introduced fines for officials who hinder the restitution process and created a property fund to compensate claimants with shares of stock for properties (farm and forest land included) that cannot be returned in kind. Shareholders in the potential $5 billion property fund, however, could not exchange their shares for cash since the fund was not listed on the stock exchange by the end of the reporting period. The Government adopted an ordinance at the end of June 2007 which should enable the fund to be evaluated and then listed on the stock exchange by mid-2008. The ordinance also provides for cash payments in lieu of restitution of up to approximately $215,000 (500,000 RON), paid over a 2-year period. Larger claims are to be additionally paid with stock in the property fund.

Under the amended law 501/2002, buildings used by public institutions (such as museums, schools, and hospitals) are to remain in tenants' hands for a period of 3 or 5 years, depending on the function of the public institutions, during which time they are to pay rent to the churches. The majority of church properties belong in this category. However, this law does not address the Greek Catholic churches, which were confiscated under Communist rule in 1948 and handed over to the Orthodox Church; the 2005 amendments stated that the issue would be addressed in separate legislation. A 1990 Government decree set up a joint Orthodox and Greek Catholic committee at the national level to resolve the situation of former Greek Catholic churches, but this committee effectively stopped meeting in 2004. A 2005 law permits the Greek Catholic Church to resort to court action whenever the bilateral dialogue regarding the restitution of churches with the Orthodox Church fails. Prior to that, the courts had often refused to rule in cases regarding Greek Catholic churches due to the 1990 decree. While this law enables the many restitution law-

suits to proceed, the law itself does not restitute properties to the Greek Catholic Church.

A 2004 law, also amended by the 2005 legislation, 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 either 3 or 5 years, depending on the current use of the structure. At the request of the Jewish community, the law extended the period of the confiscation of properties to include the time period between 1940 and 1945, when the pro-Nazi government seized a large number of Jewish properties.

The law does not prohibit or punish assembly for peaceful religious activities.

There is no law against proselytizing, nor is there a clear understanding by the authorities of what activities constitute proselytizing.

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Attendance in religion classes is optional. Only the 18 recognized religions are entitled to hold religion classes in public schools, but only if their adherents constitute a certain proportion of the classes. The law permits instruction according to the faith of students' parents. The Constitution and the new religion law allow the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the state.

Ministry of Justice regulations provide for unrestricted access of recognized religions and religious associations to any type of detention facilities, even if their assistance is not specifically requested. The National Administration of Penitentiaries (ANP) can bar the access of representatives of a religious group only if it can provide solid proof that the presence of the group in question actually endangers the security of the detention facility. The regulations also forbid any interference by the management of penitentiaries with religious programs and forbid the presence of management representatives at the meetings between representatives of any faith and prisoners. Distribution of religious publications cannot be subjected to any restriction. Prison representatives in charge of religious assistance should not be priests or representatives of any faith.

The law entitles recognized religions to have military clergy trained to render religious assistance to conscripts.

The law governing the rights of foreigners, revised in 2003, introduced a long-stay visa for religious activities. Visa requirements include approval by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, evidence that the applicants represent a religious organization legally established in the country, certification of medical insurance, and a criminal record review. The law provides for up to 5 years of visa extensions. There are penalties for any foreigner who stays without a visa, but such penalties do not appear to be linked to religious activities. By raising the threshold for qualifying as a religious association from 3 to 300 citizens, the 2006 Religion Law may disqualify many foreigners from receiving a long-stay visa for religious activities.

Local permits are required in order to build places of worship, which is similar to other types of construction.

The new religion law has been criticized by civil society groups and international organizations such as the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. The Government did not consult with unrecognized religious groups regarding the draft law. Of the 18 recognized religions that were consulted by the Government, the Greek Catholic Church and Jehovah's Witnesses refused to support the draft law from the start, while the Baptist Church withdrew its support after its proposed amendments were excluded from the text. The law requires a very high numerical threshold of 0.1 percent of the population—or approximately 22,000 persons—for new religious groups to qualify for religion status, a membership number that even some recognized religions do not have. In addition, minority religious groups must undergo a 12-year waiting period in order to qualify for the more preferential religion status. Civil society organizations recommended the elimination of both requirements during the debates on the draft religion law.

Christmas and 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.

A 2006 law to combat anti-Semitism bans Fascist, racist, and xenophobic organizations and includes the persecution of Roma in addition to Jews in its definition of the Holocaust.

The International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania (Wiesel Commission) Report (2004) made recommendations aimed at increasing public awareness of the occurrence of the Holocaust in Romania. The report recommendations included Government reversal of the previous rehabilitation of Nazi war criminals, establishment of a national Holocaust Remembrance Day, construction of a national Holocaust me-

morial and museum in Bucharest, and enforcement of legislation making Holocaust denial a crime. In addition, the commission recommended the comprehensive inclusion of the accurate history of the Holocaust in school curriculums and textbooks.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Since 1990 authorities have refused to grant religion status to the Organization of the Orthodox Believers of Old Rite, the Adventist Movement for Reform, the Baha'i Faith, and the Mormons, who are registered as religious associations. During the reporting period, no religious group tried to acquire religion status because they were waiting for the adoption of the new religion law. After the new law went into effect, religious groups were told the procedures for registration had not yet been completed.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, in 2006 religious communities received approximately $16.5 million (46,005,000 RON) in direct proportion to the number of their believers according to the 2002 census, with the Orthodox Church receiving the largest share. The Greek Catholic Church complained that the Government delayed the granted funds and the Church did not have time to spend the funds for their intended purpose by the end of the calendar year. Any unspent money is returned to the state at the end of each calendar year.

Some minority religious groups continued to report that local authorities opposed granting them construction permits for places of worship for unjustified reasons. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that in some localities authorities illegally conditioned the granting of permits on the requirement that all neighbors in the area agree to the construction (e.g., in Sighisoara, Mures County). The Jehovah's Witnesses complained that the mayor of Calarasi, Calarasi County, refused under various pretexts to enforce a June 2006 court ruling entitling the religious group to build a place of worship there. The Greek Catholic Church reported similar cases in Sapinta (Maramures County) and Pesteana (Valcea County).

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, especially in rural areas or small localities. In many cases the Adventist Church ultimately decided not to use public halls for its activities. However, in some cases local authorities did not give in to pressure by the Orthodox Church and acted in accordance with the law, granting approval.

Few politicians sponsor bills and measures that would irritate (or displease) the Orthodox Church. Generally, local officials tended to be tolerant toward minority religious groups, but there were incidents where they were pressured or intimidated by Orthodox clergy. In some instances local police and administrative authorities tacitly supported societal campaigns (a few of which involved physical intimidation) against proselytizing by non-Orthodox religious groups or demonstrated a passive attitude towards stopping the harassment (see Section III).

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported several cases where they were intimidated by local authorities. On March 17, 2007, in Targoviste, Dambovita County, two policemen, accompanied by an Orthodox priest, disrupted religious activity conducted by three Jehovah's Witnesses and forced them to come to police headquarters, where the commander told them they could not talk with persons in the streets without prior approval. The Jehovah's Witnesses did not receive an answer to a complaint filed by one of the three members involved in the incident.

On January 13, 2007, two members of Jehovah's Witnesses were stopped by the mayor of Branisca while they were practicing religious ministry. The mayor asked them to leave the locality and told the Witnesses that their preaching activity was illegal. Police said that the mayor would be investigated. The prosecutor investigated but did not bring criminal charges against the mayor.

On September 21, 2006, community police in Timisoara, Timis County, fined a member of Jehovah's Witnesses for distributing religious leaflets. In answer to the Jehovah's Witnesses' complaint, the head of Timisoara community police argued that the fine was justified because Jehovah's Witnesses did not have an advertising contract with the city hall, thus violating a local council decision. Community police also accused Jehovah's Witnesses of practicing "improper proselytism." The Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the fine in court, which cancelled it as illegal.

On August 27, 2006, the mayor of Baia de Fier, Gorj County, interrupted two Jehovah's Witnesses while they were preaching. The mayor verbally abused them and instigated local residents to acts of violence. On August 6, 2006, the mayor of Baia de Fier, a local councilor, and the head of the local police demanded that several Jehovah's Witnesses members leave Baia de Fier and verbally abused them. In an-

swer to a complaint by the Jehovah's Witnesses, the county police department blamed the incident on the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that after many years of harassment, its members did not encounter any more difficulties during the reporting period from the local authorities or the Orthodox Church in Mizil, Prahova County.

In Pesteana a Greek Catholic community established in 2005 has faced discrimination and harassment since a group of villagers, along with the Orthodox priest, switched to the Greek Catholic faith. Tensions continued during the reporting period because of the Orthodox Church's refusal to comply with a court ruling allowing Greek Catholics to have access to the local cemetery and the local authorities' refusal to issue a construction permit for a Greek Catholic church.

State authorities did not respond to Greek Catholic complaints regarding restitution of properties or discriminatory attitudes by local officials.

Jehovah's Witnesses continued to complain that their missionaries were granted only 2-year and even 1-year visa extensions without any explanation. The Baptist Church also reported that its missionaries who did not have U.S. or EU citizenship only received visas of maximum 1-year duration. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also complained of inconsistent requirements and high fees to obtain or renew visas.

Although proselytizing is not restricted by law, several minority religious groups, including both recognized and unrecognized religions, made credible complaints that low-level Government officials impeded their efforts to proselytize, interfered in religious activities, and otherwise discriminated against them during the period covered by this report.

Some minority recognized religious groups complained that public schools refused to offer classes in their faith. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, Greek Catholic Church, Baptist Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report such cases. According to these minority religious groups, the local inspectors for religion classes are in many cases Orthodox priests who routinely deny accreditation to teachers of other religions. According to Greek Catholic and Baptist reports, some school authorities or directors denied access in their schools to teachers of these religions. The School Inspectorate of Dolj County prevented, under various pretexts, a Baptist minister from teaching religion classes in the village of Carcea in the 2006–07 school year, despite the presence of 19 students requesting religion classes in this faith. Minority religious groups, including the Greek Catholic and Baptist Churches, credibly asserted that authorities pressured children of other faiths to attend classes of Orthodox religion. Allegedly some schools purposely scheduled Orthodox religion classes in the middle of the day so that all students were required to attend. The Baptist Church also reported that some school directors refused to offer Baptist religion classes even in districts where there were a large number of Baptist adherents. The Baptist Church reported cases where school officials attempted to pressure Baptist students to change their faith. The Seventh-day Adventist Church continued to complain that, since 2002, the School Inspectorate of Cluj County excluded two of the requested three classes on Adventist religion in the school curriculum, although there were sufficient students for three full classes.

In addition, the Baptist Church continued to report that, at some festivities in public schools, officials required all students to attend Orthodox religious services.

Similar official conduct requiring attendance at Orthodox religious services also reportedly occurred within the army.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church complained that authorities invited only the Orthodox Church to the National Day celebration. In addition, authorities have allowed only the Orthodox Church to have an active role in opening ceremonies in schools and on other occasions.

In November 2006 the CNCD, in reply to a complaint filed by a Buzau-based NGO, asked the Ministry of Education to remove religious symbols from schools, with the exception of classrooms where religious classes were taught. The decision caused vehement reactions by the Orthodox Church. In December 2006 the Ministry of Education decided that parents, local communities, and school management should have decision-making power on the presence or absence of icons in the classroom. The debate continued and no action had been taken by the end of the reporting period.

Several NGOs and minority religious groups complained about an Orthodox religion textbook published in July 2006 by the Ministry of Education with the coordination of the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs. The book described the emergence of the Greek Catholic Church in the 18th century as the result of "Catholic proselytizing" and described the Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, and Mormons as sects "representing a genuine threat to the society." A chapter in the book says that

sects proselytize using means such as brainwashing, bribing, blackmailing, and exploitation of the poor.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church continued to complain that some universities refused to change the date for exams for Adventist students when these are scheduled on Saturdays. Adventist school students could not participate in the school olympics because they took place only on Saturdays.

According to minority religious groups, the military clergy is comprised only of Orthodox priests, with the exception of one representative of the Catholic Church and one from the Evangelical Alliance.

Media reported that in September 2005 the Bucharest city hall illegally approved a permit to construct a building next to the Roman Catholic Saint Joseph Cathedral, which might damage the foundation of the cathedral. In November 2006 an investigative commission of the Senate urged the Government to stop the construction of the building. Despite domestic and international protests, including street demonstrations and messages from the Vatican, the European Parliament, and other forums, as well as complaints by the Roman Catholic Church, construction continued. The Roman Catholic Church complained that the courts deliberately transferred a lawsuit it filed against the construction company twice in order to further delay a ruling on the case. The case remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

Some NGOs and religious groups reported that in some counties, such as Suceava, Salaj, Mures, Maramures, and Hunedoara, the national identity card application continued to include a potentially discriminatory request for religious affiliation, despite a 2006 Government decision that eliminated this requirement. The Baha'i Faith reported that a Baha'i member was advised by the identity card bureau to write Orthodox under religious affiliation.

Some religious groups complained that the National Audio-Visual Council made it difficult for radio frequency licenses to be purchased for religious broadcasting. Minority religious groups complained of a lack of provisions to provide for the free access of religious groups to state-owned media.

In many cases religious minorities have not succeeded in regaining possession of properties that were confiscated under Communist rule. Many properties returned to religious denominations contained 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. Although some progress was made during the period covered by this report, the pace of restitution was extremely slow, and the large majority of religious property restitution cases remained unresolved. In many cases local authorities refused to turn over restituted properties in which county or municipal governments had an interest and challenged in court the decisions of the Special Restitution Commission, the section within the National Authority for Property Restitution responsible for restituting religious and ethnic communal urban property. There were many complaints that the local authorities consistently delayed providing information about the claimed properties to the Special Restitution Commission, thereby obstructing the restitution process, despite the fines stipulated by the new 2005 legislation for such delays. The National Authority for Property Restitution reported, however, that after the adoption of the 2005 legislation local authorities provided information more rapidly.

The Greek Catholic Church complained that the Special Restitution Commission delayed the actual issuance of restitution decisions after approving them in principle. There have also been many complaints that the Property Fund, which should provide compensation in stock, has not yet been listed on the stock exchange and is not expected to be listed before 2008.

The Special Commission for Restitution started its activity in 2003 and by the end of the reporting period had restituted 1,105 buildings of a total of 14,716 applications. Another 664 cases had been either denied or otherwise resolved, and 76 cases had been approved to receive compensation.

Since 2003 the Special Restitution Commission returned only 103 of the 6,723 properties other than churches that the Greek Catholic Church claimed under the restitution legislation and decided to grant compensation in eight additional cases. The Church has also received 60 to 65 of the 80 properties that were restituted by Government decree in 1992, but mostly only on paper. Three schools in Cluj were examples of this "only on paper" return. The Greek Catholic Church accused the Bucharest mayor's office of having blocked the restitution of 1 of the 80 properties.

The Government continued to avoid adoption of legislation regarding the restitution of Greek Catholic churches by the Orthodox Church, which had received them from the Communist state in 1948. The Greek Catholic Church received from the Orthodox Church, either through negotiation or in court, fewer than 200 of the 2,600 churches and monasteries it owned in 1948. Restitution of existing churches was financially important to both denominations because local residents were likely

to attend the church whether it was Greek Catholic or Orthodox. Consequently, the number of members and corresponding share of the state budget allocation for religious groups were at stake.

Courts delayed hearings on many lawsuits filed by the Greek Catholic Church, and the lawsuits were often impeded by constant appeals by the Orthodox Church. In some lawsuits over church ownership, the courts asked the Greek Catholic Church to submit the number of believers in the localities in question, although there is no legal provision requiring this. This was, for example, the case in the court in Arad County, which asked the Greek Catholic Church for the number of believers in Simand when the Greek Catholic Church claimed a church.

Historical Hungarian churches, including Roman Catholic as well as Protestant churches (Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian), have received a small number of their confiscated properties from the Government. Approximately 80 percent of the buildings previously confiscated from Hungarian churches are used as public buildings. Of approximately 3,000 buildings, 33 were restituted by Government decrees. Hungarian churches could not take possession of all of them because of lawsuits and the opposition of current occupants. The Roman Catholic Church had not received the Batthyanaeum Library, despite a 2003 court ruling. The Church filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2003, and a decision was still pending by the end of the reporting period. The discussions between the Roman Catholic Church and the Special Commission for Restitution, which reportedly began in 2006, failed to identify potential solutions for the restitution of the building. Full restitution of the Roman Catholic Bishop's palace in Oradea remained impeded by slow movement of museum holdings to their new location, which was scheduled to end in 2008. Since 2003 the Special Commission for Restitution has restituted in principle 599 of the approximately 2,700 claimed buildings.

By the end of July 2007, the total number of "resolved" cases since 2003 was 1,759, and the number of cases of restitution was 1,105. A total of 76 cases had been approved for compensation to the Hungarian churches, with 195 buildings restored during the period covered by this report. However, Hungarian churches did not regain physical possession of many of these properties. The Unitarian Church won separate lawsuits regarding three buildings and took actual possession of two of them. The mayor of Cluj delayed signing the documents for the third building under various pretexts.

The Reformed Church in Oradea filed complaints with local authorities over their allocation of a sports playground to a local Orthodox parish in 2004. The playground was promptly locked by the Orthodox parish. The Church claimed that it rightfully belonged to a local Reformed high school. Despite repeated protests by the Reformed Church, the case remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report.

In the 1990s the Government decreed the return of 42 buildings to the Jewish community, 36 of which the community took partial or full possession. In many cases restitution was delayed by lawsuits. The community was able to reclaim land only in Iasi, where it received 18 plots of land. However, 18 additional land claims of the Jewish community remained unresolved in Iasi, including a plot of land that the prefect divided and distributed to other persons. In this case, the county land restitution commission decided to give different plots in compensation for the one that was sold, but the National Agency of State Domains challenged this in court. The Special Restitution Commission processed 202 of approximately 2,000 pending cases in the reporting period and approved 66 cases for compensation. The users of 10 of the buildings challenged the restitution decisions in court, and three of the decisions were cancelled by courts. The other seven lawsuits were in progress.

Another frequent problem with restitution was a refusal by the occupant to return a property or pay rent for occupancy. The nominal owner can still be held liable for payment of property taxes in such cases.

The Greek Catholic Church complained that, in many regions where it had claimed farm and forest land, local authorities, at the request of the Orthodox Church, opposed restitution outright or proposed that restitution to all religious denominations be in direct proportion to the number of their believers (the Orthodox Church having the large majority of all believers in the country). The Greek Catholic Church also reported that the Bucharest mayor's office opposed the return of 40,000 square meters of land in Bucharest.

On March 13, 2007, a Suceava court ruled in favor of the restitution of 166,813 of the 192,000 hectares of forest land reclaimed by the Romanian Orthodox Church Fund of Bukovina. The representative of the state, the National Forest Company, appealed the ruling, and the case remained pending.

In Certeze, Satu Mare County, local authorities, pressured by Orthodox priests, continued to refuse, under various pretexts, to restitute a piece of land to the Greek

Catholic Church for the construction of a church. In April 2007 the Greek Catholic Church complained to the prefect's office; a decision remained pending at the end of the reporting period. Similar cases occurred in Baisoara and Feleacu, Cluj County.

On March 27, 2007, the CNCD ruled on a complaint filed by a Targu Mures-based NGO, deciding that local authorities in Chiheru de Jos, Mures County, discriminated against the Greek Catholic Church in the restitution of some farm land. The Orthodox Church received 90 hectares of the farm land that had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church, while the authorities offered only compensation to the latter. The CNCD reprimanded the city government for this decision. Similar cases in which the Orthodox Church received former Greek Catholic land occurred in Belotint, Gurba, Cherelus (Arad County).

According to the local Muslim community, after repeated requests the Bucharest city government approved in 2006 the allocation of a piece of land, insufficient in size, for the establishment of a Muslim cemetery. The community still had not received the land during the reporting period and continued to face problems with the burial of its members.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Acts of anti-Semitism, including desecration and vandalism of Jewish sites, continued during the period covered by this report. The extreme nationalist press and individuals continued to publish anti-Semitic articles. Some groups held public events or made statements with anti-Semitic themes. According to MCA Romania, authorities tended to minimize the significance of such incidents of vandalism, usually explaining them as being the actions of children, drunkards, or persons with mental disorders.

A series of acts of desecration or vandalism of Jewish property occurred during the reporting period. On February 11, 2007, 4 minors vandalized 22 tombs in a Jewish cemetery in Bucharest, causing damage worth approximately $3,700 (9,200 RON). Police proposed to the Prosecutor's Office that they not prosecute the minors. A group of minors vandalized an old Jewish cemetery in Tulcea on January 12, 2007, and the Prosecutor's Office also decided not to prosecute them. On January 1, 2007, the Center for the Study of the History of Romanian Jews was vandalized, and the Federation of Jewish Communities filed a complaint with police. In September 2006 a 19-year-old individual was arrested while painting swastikas on some housing blocks in Buzau. The individual had previously been involved in three other cases, which included posting racist messages on the Internet and painting Nazi symbols on a synagogue. In December 2006 the Prosecutor's Office in Suceava started the prosecution of two young persons for disseminating Fascist, racist, and xenophobic symbols, which they painted on two buildings and cemeteries in November 2005. There have been approximately a dozen reported instances of anti-Semitic property destruction and vandalism each year during the previous several reporting periods, ranging from painting swastikas on buildings, to desecrating graves and cemeteries, to vandalizing synagogues, Jewish-owned buildings, and in one case, a Torah scroll. Police sometimes identified perpetrators.

In January 2007 the Federation of Jewish Communities and a Jewish NGO filed a criminal complaint against a professor who consistently denied the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country in the media and his books. The Legionnaires (also called the Iron Guard, an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi group that existed in the country in the interwar period) continued to republish inflammatory books from the interwar period. Authorities occasionally investigated and prosecuted offenders, but all court cases resulted in acquittals.

During the reporting period, anti-Semitic views and attitudes were expressed during talk shows broadcast by private television stations, which failed to respond to complaints made by Jewish organizations. Police and prosecutors investigated two professors in the previous reporting period for publishing anti-Semitic articles or articles denying the Holocaust. One investigation was dropped; the other court case was ongoing. Authorities also initiated criminal prosecution against a 17-year-old male for creating an anti-Semitic Web site that incited violence against two teenagers of the Jewish community; a court decision was pending.

Extremist organizations occasionally held high-profile public events with anti-Semitic themes. In November 2006, *Vatra Romaneasca* (Romanian Hearth) Union, a

nationalistic NGO, sponsored a symposium to discuss, among other issues, the "Holocaust in Romania" as an expression of "institutionalized anti-Romanianism." The New Right organization continued to sponsor yearly marches, followed by religious services, to commemorate Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Legionnaire Movement. The New Right continued to foster the ideals of the Iron Guard in the media and the Internet. The New Generation Party, which grew significantly in the polls, maintained its 2004 slogan, which was used by the 1930s anti-Semitic Legionnaire Movement.

During the reporting period, the leader of the extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM), Corneliu Vadim Tudor, continued to make statements and write articles containing strong anti-Semitic attacks. In a speech on March 23, 2007, Tudor denied that any Holocaust activities had occurred in the country.

In March 2007 the Federation of Jewish Communities released a declaration expressing sadness and surprise at a December 2006 ruling by the Bucharest Appellate Court, which partially exonerated Marshal Antonescu and some others convicted for war crimes. Antonescu was responsible for widespread atrocities against Romanian Jews during World War II.

In its April 2007 annual report, the Simon Wiesenthal Center included Romania in the category of countries that paid insufficient attention to or were unsuccessful in efforts to investigate Nazi war criminals.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Most mainstream politicians continued to criticize anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia publicly, and criticized attempts to deny the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country. The Government continued to make substantial progress in recognizing and teaching the true history of the Holocaust in the country.

The Government continued to make progress in its efforts to expand public school education on the true history of the Holocaust in the country. It included the Holocaust in compulsory history courses in 7th grade as a dimension of World War II, as a full chapter in a 9th grade history course, in connection to World War II in 10th grade, as a specific theme in 11th grade, and in the chapter on national minorities in the 12th grade curriculum. There is also an optional course on "History of the Jews and Holocaust" for the 12th grade. The Government continued to train teachers in Bacau, Cluj, Bucharest, Iasi, and Craiova to teach the Holocaust. In addition, the teachers received training in programs offered jointly by the Ministry of Education and Yad Vashem Institute, and others went to Paris and the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The Ministry of Education maintained a Web site that included a guide to assist teachers nationwide who instruct courses on the Holocaust. The Ministry also published and distributed 15,000 copies of the guide in schools, continued to distribute books and supplementary materials to help teach the Holocaust, and continued to sponsor national and international seminars on the Holocaust and the teaching of its history, as well as national contests regarding the Holocaust.

In January 2007 Government officials and Members of Parliament attended and addressed the commemoration of the 1941 pogrom in Bucharest. In accordance with recommendations by the Wiesel Commission, the Government continued to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day on October 2006 with events in several cities. The events, many organized in local schools, were attended by officials and key dignitaries, including the President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister. The President laid the cornerstone for a Holocaust memorial to be built in Bucharest. In his address the President stated that Romanians still largely lacked remorse for their country's role in exterminating up to 380,000 Jews during the Second World War.

On June 6, 2007, the Government earmarked approximately $170,000 (RON 400,000) for the rehabilitation of 14 synagogues by the end of the year.

On May 24, 2007, the President signed a decree withdrawing the Star of Romania medal from PRM leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor, known for making numerous xenophobic and anti-Semitic comments.

The State Secretariat for Religious Affairs met with representatives of religious groups on a regular basis and attended the meetings of leading bodies of some religious groups. According to the State Secretariat, the Government continued its efforts to mediate and defuse tensions between the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches in some local areas. After the adoption of the new religion law, the State Secretariat started meetings at central and local levels with the recognized religions and religious associations to discuss the implementation of the law.

The State Secretariat also organized national and international symposiums and interconfessional meetings in Bucharest, Iasi, Timisoara, and Constanta between September and December 2006.

The new religion law entitles religious denominations to bury, without any restriction, their believers in the cemeteries of other religions in localities where they do not have their own cemetery or without communal cemeteries.

Several religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, reported that, after the adoption of new regulations for religious activity in prisons, the access of religious groups to detention facilities improved significantly.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that, during the reporting period, an increased number of universities and the Ministry of Justice had positive reactions to the requests of Adventist students not to schedule their exams on Saturdays, and state institutions and local authorities became increasingly cooperative with recognized minority religious groups with regard to the latter's social projects.

The Jehovah's Witnesses noted improvements in the attitude of the police and courts.

The Baptist Church also mentioned the authorities' increased tolerance toward minority religious groups.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the reporting period.

The Romanian Orthodox Church exercises substantial influence in its dominant role among a majority of the population and policymakers, and Orthodox religious leaders almost exclusively preside over state occasions. In particular, many Orthodox leaders make public appearances with prominent political figures, and religious messages often contain political promises or goals, and support for particular political positions.

Romanian Orthodox Church authorities were often intolerant of other religious groups and repeatedly criticized the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church repeatedly described as "sects." This led to physical and verbal conflicts in some cases.

Minority religious groups alleged that some members of the Orthodox clergy provoked isolated incidents of organized group intimidation, impeded their efforts to proselytize, and interfered in religious activities.

The press also reported several cases in which adherents of minority religions were prevented by others from practicing their faith, and local law enforcement authorities did not protect them.

The CNCD, established to curb discrimination of any kind (including on religious grounds), received six complaints of discrimination on religious grounds between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007.

The Jehovah's Witnesses continued to allege verbal and physical abuse, in particular by some Orthodox priests, and indifference from some police; in some instances, the priests reportedly had the support of local authorities and the police. Many complaints regarding assault remained unresolved, and aggressors were often not punished.

On April 14, 2007, in Barlad, Vaslui County, an Orthodox priest and his deputy verbally and physically abused two female Jehovah's Witnesses in the presence of a minor; the aggressors pushed the two women and the minor in a car, drove around, beat them, and threatened to kill them. The priest and his deputy eventually took the Jehovah's Witnesses members to the police. The Jehovah's Witnesses complained that such cases occurred repeatedly in Valea Mare, Arges County, in July and August 2006, where an Orthodox priest accompanied by a group of villagers verbally and physically abused a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with the police and received the answer that the case was under investigation. The mayor and other individuals from his office also threatened and verbally abused the Jehovah's Witnesses. In July 2006 an Orthodox priest stopped Jehovah's Witnesses in their ministry and insulted them.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints complained of repeated harassment and discrimination against its members, including in the workplace. This included incidents where members were threatened with losing their jobs at work or harassed by colleagues because of their religious affiliation. The Church also reported incidents in which teachers forced children to declare their faith and then harassed them. According to the Church's reports, societal actors, particularly Orthodox priests but others as well, repeatedly and consistently harassed and abused its missionaries. Police sometimes arrested and charged perpetrators of these abuses, and courts in some cases fined them.

The Baptist Church reported that, during the period covered by the report, two aggressive individuals repeatedly disrupted the religious activity of the Baptist com-

munity in Botiz, Satu Mare County, and that the police declared that they could not do anything about it.

There were several instances of priests confiscating religious publications of Jehovah's Witnesses. On November 8, 2006, in Ulmeni, Calarasi County, Orthodox priests confiscated materials, and on November 4, 2006, in Capalnita, Harghita County, a Roman Catholic priest did the same. On July 29, 2006, Jehovah's Witnesses preaching in Namaesti village were insulted by an Orthodox priest in their ministry. On July 13, 2006, an Orthodox priest confiscated religious leaflets from a group of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tecuci, Galati County. The priest reportedly verbally and physically abused them. After the Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint, one of the members involved in the incident was called to the police station, where an officer told him that some villagers, allegedly disturbed by the religious activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, had filed complaints against them. The police did not answer the complaints filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses in these cases.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported similar incidents with Orthodox priests in several localities. In Pitesti, Arges County, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had problems for several years with an Orthodox priest who repeatedly took and broke the missionaries' name tags and destroyed religious pamphlets they were carrying. In Viseu, Maramures County, the Seventh-day Adventist Church rented a public hall for religious activities between March 3 and 17, 2007. An Orthodox priest wrote a letter to the mayor expressing indignation that he had given his approval to rent the hall to the Adventists for "aggressive proselytizing." Both the mayor and the director of the public hall responded that the action of the Adventist Church was in line with both the Constitution and the new religion law, which guarantee freedom of religion.

Minority religions credibly complained about the intolerant attitude of some Orthodox religion teachers, who in some instances depicted non-Orthodox churches to students as "sects" and a danger to all who might wish to join them, and in rare cases incited students to desecrate minority religious symbols.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, Greek Catholic Church, Baptist Church, and Baha'i Faith continued to complain that Orthodox priests allowed the burial of non-Orthodox believers in confessional or even public cemeteries (often treated as confessional by Orthodox priests in rural areas) only when certain conditions were met; they allowed burials only in isolated sections of the cemetery or if non-Orthodox religious services were not used. During the reporting period, the Adventist Church reported such incidents in Filipestii de Padure, Stejaru, Neamt County, and Scobinti, Iasi County. In Scobinti an Adventist believer was eventually buried according to the Orthodox rite, after repeated attempts by the Adventist Church to bury him with Adventist religious services. These incidents took place in 2007 after the adoption of the new religion law, which allows the religious groups access to cemeteries belonging to other churches. To avoid such encounters, the Adventist Church decided to renew its request to the mayors' offices for land for cemeteries in a large number of localities where it had congregations.

The Baptist Church also reported that its attempts to receive land for cemeteries in some localities were unsuccessful. Orthodox priests also denied access for Greek Catholics to many cemeteries in more than 20 localities, including Pecica, Arad County, Desesti, Maramures County, Ungheni, Mures County, Salva, Bistrita-Nasaud County. According to Baptist reports, in December 2006 unidentified individuals vandalized four tombs of neo-Protestant believers in Targu Neamt, Neamt County.

Relations between the Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Archbishopric of Timisoara continued to be amicable and cooperative. The Orthodox Bishopric of Caransebes also continued to have similar positive dialogues with the Greek Catholic Church.

For the most part, however, Orthodox leaders opposed and delayed returning churches to the Greek Catholics. The Greek Catholic Church of the eparchy of Lugoj complained that the Orthodox Bishopric of Arad, Ienopole, and Halmagiu, which was using more than 90 Greek Catholic churches, not only refused to restitute them but also to hold alternate religious services. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Orthodox Bishopric had returned no church to the Greek Catholics.

Despite the Orthodox Patriarch's promise to restitute a major cathedral in Gherla, Cluj County, the Greek Catholic Church had not received it by the end of the period covered by this report. An important Greek Catholic church in Bucharest, the subject of a case that awaited a hearing by the ECHR, was eventually restituted by the Orthodox Church in December 2006. The church was supposed to be returned to the Greek Catholic Church 16 years ago, but the Orthodox Church kept appealing the original court decision, thus delaying the restitution.

Despite the stated desire for dialogue, the Orthodox Church demolished Greek Catholic churches—some of which had been declared historical monuments—in at least 10 localities, half of which were in Cluj County. Authorities did not react to Greek Catholic complaints about the illegal demolition of a Greek Catholic church in Taga, Cluj County, in May 2006. Another church continued to face unauthorized demolition in Ungheni, Mures County, where the Orthodox Church continued construction of a new church around the Greek Catholic church. In a similar manner, using an oft repeated tactic of building new walls around the outer walls of the older church, the Orthodox Church demolished an 18th century Greek Catholic church in Badon, Salaj County, on April 5, 2007.

In Nicula, Cluj County, the Orthodox Church continued construction close to the famous Greek Catholic Monastery of Nicula, despite a court order to halt any construction. A decision in a slow-moving lawsuit over the ownership of the church remained pending. Similar cases were reportedly developing in Orastie, Hunedoara County, and Iara, Cluj County, where the Orthodox Church began construction of buildings close to the former Greek Catholic churches, presumably with the intention of subsequently demolishing the latter. Over the years the Orthodox Church repeatedly rejected the Greek Catholic requests for alternating services in over 230 localities.

Longstanding tensions persisted between the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches in many localities where large numbers of the Orthodox congregation switched to the Greek Catholic Church. An example is in Stei, Hunedoara County, where the Orthodox Church continued to deny the Greek Catholics access to their former church. The Greek Catholic Church also could not obtain possession of the rectory restituted in 2004 because the Orthodox Church appealed a restitution decision in favor of the Greek Catholics. Other examples of this behavior occurred in Valea de Jos, Bihor County, and in Chet, Bihor County. The Greek Catholic Church asked the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs in many cases to mediate its dialogue with the Orthodox Church concerning alternative services in the churches, but the State Secretariat failed to do so.

Representatives of minority religious groups credibly complained that Orthodox priests give out most of the religious assistance in the country, partly because the Orthodox Church prevents minority religions from granting humanitarian or religious assistance to hospitals, children's homes, and shelters for the elderly. Charitable activities carried out by other churches in children's homes and shelters were often negatively interpreted as proselytizing. In many cases minority religious groups felt compelled to form nonreligious associations to gain access to public institutions to carry out charitable activities.

After the dialogue between the Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches came to a halt in 2004, disputes between the two religions' believers over church property increased in intensity. Greek Catholic communities decided, in many cases, to build new churches because of the lack of progress in restituting their properties either through dialogue with the Orthodox Church or in court; however, their efforts were hampered by the Orthodox Church, sometimes with the support of local authorities. Tensions continued in many localities where the Orthodox Church refused to comply with court rulings that ordered restitution of churches to the Greek Catholic Church, such as in Bogdan Voda, Maramures County; Valanii de Munte, Bihor County; Lupsa, Alba County; and in localities where the Greek Catholic Church began lawsuits for restitution, such as Prunis, Cluj County; Simand, Arad County; Camarzana, Satu Mare County; and Viile Satu Mare, Satu Mare County. In Valanii de Munte, Bihor County, on May 28, 2007, approximately 30 Orthodox priests and 80 believers prevented the enforcement of a final court ruling restituting a church to the Greek Catholics.

During this reporting period, the Orthodox Church increased pressure on Parliamentarians to support a draft law stipulating the restitution of land and other properties in direct proportion to the number of believers, which would actually legitimize to a great extent the Communists' decision to give the Greek Catholic properties to the Orthodox Church.

In most localities with two churches (one of which had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church) and only one Orthodox priest, the Orthodox Church frequently does one of three things: holds alternate religious services between the two locations, keeps the Orthodox church locked and holds the services in the former Greek Catholic church, or establishes a second Orthodox parish in the locality. Additionally, more than 20 former Greek Catholic churches remained closed.

In Dumbraveni, Sibiu County, the Orthodox Church continued to refuse to enforce a previous court ruling to share a local church with the Greek Catholic Church. Although the Orthodox Church promised to return the Greek Catholic church after it

completed the construction of a new Orthodox church, it continued to refuse to do so after the construction was over.

A Roman Catholic Csango community, an ethnic group that speaks a Hungarian dialect, continued to complain that they were unable to hold religious services in their mother tongue because of opposition by the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Iasi, which cooperates closely with the Orthodox Church, despite a 2005 CNCD decision holding that the act of denying religious services in the mother tongue is a restriction on religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government of Romania, including at senior political levels. The U.S. Government also maintained active public outreach on religious freedom. The Embassy maintained close contact with a broad range of religious groups and NGOs in the country, including Muslim groups and other minority religious groups, to monitor and discuss religious freedom. The Ambassador and other Embassy representatives regularly met and raised religious freedom concerns with religious leaders and Government officials who work on religious affairs in Bucharest and in other cities.

Throughout the period covered by the report, Embassy representatives and other U.S. Government officials discussed with Government officials at multiple levels the importance of full official recognition of the Holocaust in the country, improvements in Holocaust education in school curricula, and implementation of the 2004 recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. The Embassy supported visiting delegations focusing on issues related to the Holocaust, including the Wiesel Commission members and U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad Foundation. Embassy personnel and visiting U.S. officials repeatedly discussed the Holocaust in Romania with local and international members of the Wiesel Commission and supported the work of the commission. Among many other events, the Ambassador and other U.S. officials participated in the commemoration of National Holocaust Day in October 2006. The Embassy also supported the activities that the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum carried out. The Embassy cosponsored a 4-day conference on racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia in Bacau in May 2007 with NGOs and a round table on unresolved Holocaust issues with the Elie Wiesel Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officials repeatedly raised concerns about the slow restitution of religious properties, particularly of Greek Catholic churches, with Government officials, including the President, Prime Minister, and the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs. Members of the Embassy's office in Cluj had meetings with Reformed, Evangelical, Greek Catholic, Jewish, and Orthodox officials in Cluj and Oradea, and discussed restitution of religious properties. U.S. officials continued to lobby in Government circles for fair treatment on property restitution issues, including religious and communal properties, and for nondiscriminatory treatment of all religious groups.

In 2006 Embassy and other U.S. Government officials continuously expressed concern to officials and encouraged revision of the Government-sponsored draft law on religion, which included numerous elements that would inhibit the freedom of religion. The Embassy approached the Government at all levels on this issue, including Parliamentarians, presidential advisors, and the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs.

RUSSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. Although the Constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

Conditions improved for some minority religious groups while remaining largely the same for most, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. Some federal agencies, such as the Federal Registration Service, and many local authorities, continued to restrict the rights of a few religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations" (the 1997 Law) continued to seriously disadvantage some religious groups considered nontraditional.

There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), treated the leadership of some Islamic groups as security threats.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Religious matters were not a source of social tension or problems for the large majority of citizens, but there were some problems between majority and minority groups.

Prejudices against non-Orthodox religions were behind manifestations of anti-Semitism and occasional friction with non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Because xenophobia, racism, and religious bigotry are often intertwined, it was sometimes difficult to determine which prejudice was the primary motivation behind discrimination against members of religious groups. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) occasionally disseminated negative publications and held protest meetings against religions considered nontraditional, including alternative Orthodox congregations. Some ROC clergy stated publicly their opposition to any expansion of the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other non-Orthodox denominations.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and engages a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly supported the implementation of these programs. The Embassy and Consulates maintained a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings to discuss the U.S. Government's concerns. Mission officers looked into possible violations of religious freedom and were also prepared, if necessary, to raise the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in consultations with Government officials. Other Department of State and U.S. Government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 6,592,769 square miles and a population of 142.8 million. In practice, only a minority of citizens actively participated in any religion. Many who identified themselves as members of a faith participated in religious life rarely or not at all. There is no one set of reliable statistics that breaks down the population by denomination, and the statistics below are compiled from Government, polling, and religious group sources.

Approximately 100 million citizens consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians, although the vast majority are not regular churchgoers. Fourteen million to twenty-three million Muslims form the country's largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga-Urals region and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations. The Buddhist Association of Russia estimated there were between 1.5–2 million Buddhists, who live in the traditionally Buddhist regions of Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. According to the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, Protestants make up the second largest group of Christian believers, with 3,500 registered organizations and more than 2 million followers. There are an estimated 600,000 Jews (0.4 percent of the population); the vast majority live in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Catholic Church estimated that there are 600,000 Catholics, most of whom are not ethnic Russians. In some areas, such as Yakutiya and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or alongside other religions.

According to Human Rights Ombudsman Lukin's annual report, the Ministry of Justice had registered 22,956 religious organizations as of January 1, 2007, 443 more than January 2006. Among the registered religious groups are Russian Orthodox, Orthodox Old Believers, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Evangelical Christians, Catholic, and other denominations.

There were a large number of foreign missionaries operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups, most often through the registration process. The Con-

stitution 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 1997 Law declares all religions equal before the law, prohibits Government interference in religion, and establishes simple registration procedures for religious groups. The country is by law a secular state without a state religion. The preamble to the 1997 Law, however, acknowledges Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and other religions as constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage and also recognized the "special contribution" of Orthodoxy to the country's history and to the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture.

The 1997 Law creates three categories of religious communities (groups, local organizations, and centralized organizations) with different levels of legal status and privileges.

The most basic unit is the "religious group," which has the right to conduct worship services and rituals and to teach religion to its members. A group is not registered with the Government and consequently does not have the legal status to open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals, and among the armed forces. However, individual members of a group may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In principle, groups are thus able to rent public spaces and hold services, but in practice, members of unregistered groups sometimes encountered significant difficulty in doing so.

The next level is the "local religious organization," which can be registered if it has at least 10 citizen members and is either a branch of a centralized organization or has existed in the locality as a religious group for at least 15 years. Local religious organizations have legal status and may open bank accounts, own property, issue invitation letters to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, and conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, and the armed forces.

"Centralized religious organizations" can be registered by joining at least three local organizations of the same denomination. In addition to all the legal rights enjoyed by local organizations, centralized organizations also have the right to open new local organizations without any waiting period. Centralized organizations that have existed in the country for more than 50 years have the right to use the words "Russia" or "Russian" in their official names.

The 1997 Law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups and thereby prohibit all of the activities of a religious community. Following the passage of the law, groups that failed to reregister by December 31, 2000, became subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), i.e., deprivation of juridical status.

In November 2006 the Government eliminated the value-added tax on religious products sold by religious organizations.

The 2006 Law on Public Associations (NGO or NPO Law) contains a few provisions that apply to religious organizations.

The NGO law grants the Ministry of Justice the authority to obtain certain documents, to send its representatives (with advance notice) to attend religious organization events, and to conduct an annual review of the organization's compliance with its mission statement on file with the Government. Religious organizations are required to inform the Federal Registration Service (FRS) of changes in leadership or address within 3 days of the changes taking effect. The law allows FRS to file suit against organizations that fail to comply with the law's requirements. If a court finds in favor of FRS, then the organization may be closed down. In addition, a contemporaneous amendment to the Civil Code may affect religious organizations, but the effect of this amendment and all other amendments remains to be seen. Some denominations with numerous local organizations feared that compliance with these changes would be highly burdensome.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that federal officials used the NGO Law to investigate their headquarters, and that Government officials told them the investigation was launched on the basis of this law.

Under the NGO law, religious organizations have new reporting requirements. These reporting requirements are extensive, and many NGOs and religious groups complained about the time and effort needed to complete them. The required reporting includes information about "organized events and activities" and accounts of funds received from international and foreign organizations, foreign citizens, and stateless persons. This generates difficulties for reporting anonymous donors. Failure to file reports and complete them adequately can result in warnings that may lead to the organization being closed down.

After lobbying by many religious groups, including the ROC, the Government reduced the reporting requirements for all religious organizations and extended the

financial reporting deadline of the NGO Law to June 1. Russian organizations are no longer asked whether they receive income from Russian individuals or the Russian state. Although each organization must still supply full names, addresses, and passport details of members belonging to its governing body, they no longer have to provide details of religious congresses, conferences or governing body meetings, including the number of participants. The accounting procedures have been significantly simplified.

While neither the Constitution nor the 1997 Law accords explicit privileges or advantages to the four "traditional" religions, in practice the ROC cooperates more closely with the Government than do other faiths. The ROC has entered into a number of formal and informal agreements with various Government ministries that give the ROC far greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, and the army. ROC activities with the Government include support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones, the holding of religious services for those serving in conflict zones, and cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to combat extremism.

The ROC has special arrangements with Government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Internal Affairs, and Emergency Situations, and other bodies, such as the Federal Tax Service, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces. Not all of the details of these agreements were accessible, but available information indicated that the ROC received preferential treatment.

Officials in law enforcement and the legislative branches spoke of protecting the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include some Protestant and newer religious movements. In January 2007, the Moscow City Prosecutor warned of the danger posed by extremist and dangerous new religious movements entering the country, and promised tough measures to stop their activities. To date, no such measures have been proposed or implemented.

The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, last updated in 2000, states that "ensuring national security includes countering the negative influence of foreign religious organizations and missionaries."

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities, and they may not conduct services or other religious activities unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices opened without registering or were accredited to a registered religious organization.

The Moscow City Duma is proposing a law that would prohibit "religion agitation" in public. Administrative punishment for violations under this article would be approximately $4–20 (100–500 rubles).

The regions of Kabardino-Balkariya and Dagestan have laws banning extremist Islamic "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups. However, the former president of the Kabardino-Balkaria republic ordered the closure of six of seven mosques in Nalchik, the region's capital. The new president of the region has reopened one mosque and announced plans to reopen another.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities maintain 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 continued to deal with the Presidential Administration through the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academic specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of traditional and major nontraditional groups. Other governmental bodies for religious affairs include a Governmental Commission for the Affairs of Religious Associations, headed by the Minister of Culture and Mass Communications.

Avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities also exist. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential Representatives (Polpreds) include suboffices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations. Religious minorities most often encounter problems at the regional level.

The Russian Academy of State Service works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, to train regional and municipal offi-

cials in properly implementing the 1997 Law. The Academy opens many of its conferences to international audiences.

The Office of Federal Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin contains a department for religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints. The Ombudsman's Office receives 200–250 religious freedom complaints every year, which represents thousands of alleged individual violations. The Office has determined that approximately 75 percent of these cases represent genuine violations of religious freedom rights guaranteed under the law.

Contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, were used by some regional officials to restrict the activities of religious minorities. According to many observers, local governments are more susceptible to pressure from the local religious majority and therefore are more likely to discriminate against local minority religious communities. Many localities appeared to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the Federal Government intervenes in local cases, it works through the Procuracy, Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and the courts. The Federal Government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

In July 2006 the country hosted the World Summit of Religious Leaders, where President Putin spoke to the participants about increasing religious tolerance. Officials met regularly during the reporting period with leaders of several faiths, including Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

The Federal Government does not require religious instruction in schools, but it continues to allow public use of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. Several regions offer a course on Orthodoxy in public schools, and five regions (Kaluga, Tver, Bryansk, Smolensk, and Voronezh) have a mandatory class on the Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture. The Belgorod Oblast voluntary course can be avoided only if the parents themselves provide and pay for an alternative course. The course is offered as an elective in several other regions. In regions where the class is not mandatory, in practice students may be compelled to take it where schools do not provide alternatives. Minister of Education Andrey Fursenko warned against these lessons, and he proposed instead a course on "world religions" or on Orthodoxy. Fursenko's proposal remained controversial among some experts, including some in the ROC. Some regions offer a class on "History of Religion," a proposal that Fursenko suggested but did not introduce nationally. The Ministry of Education rejected continued publication and dissemination of a textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, with descriptions of some minority religions that members of those religions found objectionable; for example, the text's stance on Jews, certain non-traditional denominations, and foreigners is considered problematic by some. Some schools continued to use the text.

There is a universal military draft for men, but the Constitution provides for alternative service for those who refuse to bear arms for reasons of conscience. The length of alternative service is longer than standard military service. The standard length of military service is 18 months, alternative service in a Ministry of Defense agency is 27 months, and alternative service in a nondefense agency is 31.5 months. Some human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service for draftees requesting alternative assignments acts as a punishment for those who exercise their convictions.

In July 2006 a new law came into effect that repeals deferrals for students of religious training institutions. The law was protested by many religious groups, including the ROC.

The 2002 Law on Extremism, amended in July 2006, can affect religious groups, particularly Muslim groups, by criminalizing a broad spectrum of activities. For example, Mansur Shangareev was convicted of extremism and sentenced to 2 years in prison for "actively adhering to a radical trend of Islam" that claimed superiority over mainstream Islam, and for making "remarks to Muslim girls about their immodest dress," among other things.

The 2006 amendments allow some charges of extremism where people are alleged to have defended or expressed sympathy with other individuals already charged with extremism.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Restrictions on religious freedom generally fall into four categories: registration of religious organizations, access to places of worship (including access to land and building permits), visas for foreign religious personnel, and Government harassment of religious organizations or individuals. In the first three cases, religious communities rely upon Government officials to grant them permission to assemble, own or

build property, or allow people into the country. While the individual cases are too numerous to mention, several examples in each category are detailed below.

Following the 1997 Law's registration deadline of December 31, 2001, the Ministry of Justice began to legally dissolve approximately 2,000 organizations that had not reregistered, sometimes over the complaints of groups who claimed that they were still active. Complaints of involuntary dissolution have decreased as this wave of dissolutions has passed, and only a few were still being contested in court.

Many of the difficulties that religious communities face are rooted in bureaucratic obstacles and corruption, not religious bigotry. While it is nearly impossible to discern if groups are being targeted because of their religious beliefs or because they are vulnerable to demands by corrupt officials, the net effect is a restriction on their ability to worship freely.

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. Some religious groups registered as social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations.

In June 2007 a St. Petersburg Court suspended and ordered The Scientology Centre St. Petersburg to close. The Centre had refused to allow Government officials to sit in on confidential "auditing" sessions and did not hand over confidential documents from these sessions when requested. Government authorities claimed to have a right to these inspections and documents under the new NGO law. The Centre continued to operate at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Unification Church was contesting the refusal of officials to reregister three local organizations. The Unification Church alleged that its registration process had been complicated by the requirements imposed by a broad range of Government agencies, including the fire safety office, tax inspectors, and epidemiological inspectors. The Church also reported that federal authorities investigated its compliance with visa rules, and scrutinized missionaries' activities and property holdings.

Local authorities continued an investigation of the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center—their national headquarters in St. Petersburg—in what the Jehovah's Witnesses describe as a search for an excuse to shut down their operations. The authorities indicated to the Jehovah's Witnesses that any irregularity they found would be used as grounds to close the center. On February 16, 2007, the center wrote to the Prosecutor General's Office expressing concern over the several investigations, which had continued for more than 2 years. The St. Petersburg Prosecutor's Office, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Russian Federation sent replies stating that the investigators had not exceeded their authority and had not violated the law.

As of December 2006, the Federal Registration Service had registered 407 Jehovah's Witnesses local organizations in 72 regions, but problems with registration continued in some areas, notably Moscow, where the Moscow Golovinskiy Intermunicipal District Court and the Moscow City Court (of appeal) have banned them since 2004. The Moscow community appealed the ban to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

In June 2006 the FRS branch in Novosibirsk used the NGO law and found that a local Pentecostal church, the Word of Life, violated its charter by organizing a show in a Siberian military unit. The FRS sent a written notification to the church stating that if they violated their charter again, the FRS would file a suit to close the church.

During the reporting period, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) unanimously ruled against the Government on three religious freedom cases involving the registration of the Salvation Army, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Scientology. In all three cases, the court unanimously determined that the Government violated its international obligations under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Other religious freedom cases against the Government were pending at the ECHR.

In *Moscow Branch of the Salvation Army* v. *Russia*, the ECHR ruled in October 2006 that the Government's refusal to reregister the Moscow branch of the organization violated the right of assembly and freedom of religion of the Salvation Army. The Government paid $13,418 (€10,000) in damages and legal fees to the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army cannot reregister its Moscow branch, as the deadline for reregistration under the 1997 Religions Law was May 2000. They may only be reregistered by the Moscow Chief Directorate of the Ministry of Justice. It was the Chief Directorate that designated the Salvation Army as a paramilitary organization, and successfully argued in court that this prevented reregistration. The Supreme Court did not address this designation, nor did they remove it.

In the Jehovah's Witnesses case, *Kuznetsov and Others* v. *Russia*, the ECHR ruled in January 2007 that Chelyabinsk authorities had violated the rights of the

Chelyabinsk Jehovah's Witnesses when they disrupted a worship meeting in 2000. The court ordered the Government to pay $121,486 (€90,544) to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In *Church of Scientology Moscow* v. *Russia*, the ECHR ruled that Moscow authorities violated the religious freedom rights of the Church of Scientology under the European Convention on Human Rights by refusing to reregister their Moscow church. The Scientologists had applied to reregister 11 times with no success. The Government did not appeal, and the decision is final.

Local authorities refused to register Scientology centers as religious organizations in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Since these centers have not been in existence for 15 years, they are by law ineligible to register as religious organizations and cannot perform religious services (although they were allowed to hold meetings and seminars). The Churches of Scientology in Surgut City and Nizhnekamsk (Tatarstan) filed suits with the ECHR contesting the refusal of officials to register the churches based on the 15-year rule. The ECHR found the suits admissible in June 2005 and combined the cases. The case awaited a final decision, which the Church of Scientology expected by the end of 2007.

According to FRS statistics, there are 22,956 registered religious groups operating in the country, approximately half of which are affiliated with the ROC. In 2005, the last year for which statistics are available, authorities investigated the activities of 3,526 religious organizations during the 2005 calendar year. The Ministry of Justice sent notifications of violations to 2,996 religious organizations. The courts made decisions to liquidate 59 local organizations for violations of constitutional norms and federal legislation during that period.

The Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that in some cases, authorities had consulted with the ROC in determining whether to approve their requests for registration.

Many religious groups had difficulty acquiring land or permits to build houses of worship. Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities.

Some religious groups, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses, but also the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), Pentecostal congregations, and the Evangelical Christian Missionary Union, reported that local authorities in recent years denied them permission to acquire land on which to construct places of worship. Authorities continued to deny construction permits to several groups.

Many nontraditional denominations frequently complained that they were unable to obtain venues for worship. Because they are small and often newly established, they often lacked the necessary resources to buy or rent facilities on the open market and must rely on Government assistance. Because they are nontraditional, they frequently met opposition from the traditional communities and often were unable to find Government officials who were willing to assist them in renting state-owned property. There were multiple reports of religious organizations who were not allowed to renew leases on public and private buildings. Increased competition for space in a growing economy and increasing real estate prices led many owners (public and private) to lease property to higher paying clients, and in some cases, religious groups were refused outright at any price.

Representatives of multiple Protestant groups spoke about increasing difficulty in extending existing leases or signing new leases for worship premises, the majority of which are still state-controlled. For example, administrations in Tikhoretsk and Volgograd refused to extend rental agreements with member churches of the Union of Christian Evangelical Missionaries, which used the spaces for worship.

The "Word of Life" Christian Church in Kaluga region faced great difficulties trying to build its church. The Church had been frequently visited by tax, fire, and other Government inspectors. In December 2006 the mayor issued a decree to confiscate the Church's building and land, which would then be given to a foreign commercial developer. The Church's appeals to the governor, prosecutor, and police were unsuccessful, although the property had not been confiscated.

The NGO Sova Center reported at the end of the reporting period that the Vladimir Muslim community still was not able to obtain public land to build a mosque. In 2004, despite interference from the Vladimir city authorities, the congregation constructed a mosque on private land near a house that community members bought and used as a temporary prayer house. The mosque was called a community house and was used by the local community of Muslims even though it did not have room for all 25,000 members.

The Sochi mayor's office continued to deny the Muslim community authorization to build a new mosque; the current premises insufficiently accommodate the membership. Officials allotted land several times but never transferred it to the Muslim community. According to the regional government, authorities can allocate land for a mosque only after a public opinion survey indicates that the proposed location

would not cause conflict. In March 2007 Abdul-Vakhed Niyazov, Chairman of the Sochi Russian Islamic Cultural Center, asked Presidential Representative to the Southern Federal District Dmitriy Kozak to investigate.

On May 14, 2007, at a public hearing in the city of Murmansk, residents of the central city district voted to refuse the Jehovah's Witnesses permission to build a church in the city's downtown area. Mayor Mikhail Savchenko issued a statement noting that even though it was his preference that new places of worship be built outside of the city center, he regretted the lack of tolerance shown at the public hearing. Jehovah's witnesses in Dezershinsk, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast failed to obtain land for constructing a building of worship.

Religious news sources claimed that authorities acting on behalf of the ROC sometimes prevented Orthodox churches not belonging to the ROC, including the True Orthodox, from obtaining or maintaining buildings for worship. In 2005 a church reconstructed and renovated by the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) was transferred to the ROC Diocese of Stavropol. The subsequent protest by the ROAC culminated in the beating of Metropolitan Valentin (see the Abuse section) and threats to other ROAC clergy. The Zheleznogorsk City Administration subsequently promised to allot a new building to the ROAC, but had not done so by the end of the reporting period.

There was an ongoing conflict between the Moscow Hare Krishnas and the Government regarding allocating a plot of land for worship. In the first half of 2007, Moscow City authorities rescinded their allotment of land for the construction of a Krishna temple in the Moscow city center and instead allotted the Krishnas five acres of land in the Moscow suburbs.

Since Richen Ling, a Tibetan Buddhist community, lost its Moscow city center premises in 2004 due to a municipal construction project, it continued to rent facilities since it has been unable to secure a permanent house of worship.

The Unification Church reported difficulties in establishing a Eurasian Church Center in Moscow to coordinate church activities in the region. The authorities would not allow the church building to be occupied until an annex illegally built by the former owner was legalized. The church estimated that the building would remain closed for 2 years until all the necessary documentation was done.

Local officials have refused permission to build to a Catholic parish in Barnaul (Altai Region) and to a Muslim community in Sochi for more than 10 years.

The Church of Scientology reported that it sometimes had difficulties getting permits for large events in Moscow.

In October 2006 local authorities in Tyumen destroyed a building that was intended to house a mosque. The Muslim community had spent years working to receive ownership of the building, which had been a mosque before the 1917 revolution. The authorities had decided to give the building to the Muslim community earlier that year.

In June 2006 the city of Krasnodar demanded the demolition of a private home intended to host worship for an Evangelical group. The lower court upheld the city's decision. A court appeal was pending.

In January 2006 the district court in Astrakhan ordered the demolition of a mosque on an access road to the city. The construction of the mosque had been allowed by the mayor in 1998, but officials argued in 2006 that the land was zoned residential, that the mosque was illegally built, and that the community must demolish it. Following the failure of their appeal to the Russian Supreme Court, which upheld the demolition order and held the Muslim community must pay for the demolition itself, the Muslim community appealed to the ECHR, which agreed to hear the case.

The Emmanuel Pentecostal Church continued to face difficulties building its church in Moscow. The old House of Culture, which the Emmanuel church wants to convert into a prayer house and office building, sits on land that the local land committee agreed to rent to the church. Other local authorities opposed to that location for the church have held up the registration of the land title, some on grounds that local public opinion is against the religious community involved. They refused to allow the building to be reconstructed as a church. On March 26, 2007, arsonists set the building on fire.

The 1997 Law appeared to change the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers. Immediately after its implementation, nontraditional groups reported problems receiving long-term visas.

During the reporting period, the number of foreign religious personnel experiencing visa and customs difficulties while entering or leaving the country decreased, although some problems continued. Authorities have deported or denied entry to religious workers with valid visas in the past. The Unification Church in Moscow appealed the January 2006 deportation of its founder and legal/spiritual advisor, Jack

Corley, to the ECHR. By law he must remain outside of the country for at least 5 years, at which point he can reapply for residence. The ECHR appeal joined two similar cases involving deportations of Unification Church foreign missionaries. A member of the Japanese Unification Church invited to Ufa to make a presentation was detained by FSB officers and forced to buy tickets to Moscow for himself and an FSB officer for onward deportation to Japan. He appealed the deportation and won the right to re-enter.

In June 2007 the Government threatened to deport three Falun Gong followers to China, where they could face official persecution. The U.N. High Commission on Refugees arranged to have these practitioners resettled to other countries. On March 28, 2007, officials deported a Falun Gong follower and her young daughter to China.

In December 2006 a Moscow court rejected the appeal against deportation of Sunday Adelaja, a leader of the Ukrainian "Embassy of God." The court found Adelaja's deportation to be "in the interests of state security." In May 2006, while traveling to Moscow in order to participate in a television program, Adelaja had been denied entry at a Moscow airport, despite having a multiple-entry visa.

Visa problems decreased for some groups. Groups such as the LDS and Roman Catholic churches, among others, reported that the Government issued most of their clergy 1-year visas that may be extended to 5-year visas after they have entered the country. They reported that the administration of the visas had improved since the last reporting period. Foreign clergy are particularly important for the Roman Catholic Church, since there are few ordained Russian priests. Catholic authorities reported a decrease in visa problems for priests during the period covered by this report.

Many religious groups were unable to regain property confiscated in the Soviet era and to acquire new property. The SOVA Center said the property problem was most prevalent among Muslims and Protestants.

Although authorities have returned many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, all four traditional religions continued to pursue restitution cases. As of May 2007, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade was preparing legislation on returning most religious property (except for a few cultural and historical treasures) to its pre-1917 owners.

The ROC appeared to have greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still had disputed property claims. At the end of the reporting period, the Moscow Diocese of the ROC owned more than 1,400 buildings, up from 130 in 1998.

Property claims for the ROC are legally complicated, since there was no separation of church and state before the revolution. Most of the Orthodox church buildings that were returned to the ROC were not considered ROC property before 1917. The ROC was only entitled to use these buildings and theoretically could have been evicted, but there was no attempt to do so. The ROC fully owned only churches built, bought, or received after 1991.

The Roman Catholic Community reported 44 disputed properties, including the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. While most state-owned property was returned, the community had no success with buildings that had been privatized. The community continued to work with authorities in the federal and local levels to resolve these issues.

Muslims in Beslan appealed to the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations for the return of its Cathedral Mosque.

The Jewish community was still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The Federation of Jewish Communities reported that federal officials had been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, as had some regional officials, although some Jews asserted that the Government had returned only a small portion of the total properties confiscated during the Soviet period. The international Chabad Lubavitch organization repeatedly sought return of the Schneerson Collection, a large collection of revered religious books and documents of the Lubavitcher rebbes, which the authorities consider part of the country's cultural heritage.

Some human rights groups and religious minorities accused the Procurator General of encouraging legal action against a number of minority religions and of giving official support to materials that are biased against Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, the LDS, and others. There were credible reports that individuals within the federal security services and other law enforcement agencies harassed certain minority religious groups, investigated them for purported criminal activity and violations of tax laws, and pressured landlords to renege on contracts. In some cases the security services were thought to have influenced the Ministry of Justice to reject registration applications.

Law enforcement officials in Kabardino-Balkariya reportedly kept lists of students who said Muslim prayers, had Muslim middle names, or who sent clips with Islamic themes through their mobile phones. During the reporting period, the Sova Center reported that in general the pressure on Muslims in Kabardino-Balkariya dropped with the appointment of the republic's new leadership.

A school principal in Argayash allegedly forced a member of the Pentecostal church to resign from her kindergarten teaching post or else face criminal charges of maltreating children. Local news reports cited complaints from parents that implied that the teacher had been teaching about religion and alleged that she had physically mistreated them. Church officials maintained that these charges were fabricated and that she was actually removed due to her religious beliefs.

In June 2007 officials in the city of Uzlovaya banned a Christian music festival organized by local Baptist churches. The officials originally gave permission for the festival but revoked it after reportedly receiving phone calls from the local FSB. The mayor reportedly claimed not to have known that the festival was a religious event.

In May 2007 local authorities in the town of Revda (Murmansk region) ordered the closure of a Pentecostal drug and alcohol rehabilitation center for the homeless. Two members of the town council and a local Russian Orthodox priest first organized public opposition to the center and held a screening of a negative film about Pentecostals. Pentecostals were not invited to the public hearing that decided the issue; they showed up nonetheless and were booed by the approximately 800 participants. The town council then voted to close the center. The Pentecostals planned to appeal the matter to a court.

On December 25, 2006, a court found Viktor Tanakov, high priest of the ethnic Mari faith, guilty of incitement to religious and ethnic hatred for having written and distributed a brochure entitled "The Priest Speaks," which describes all world religions as "demonic." He lost his appeal to the Supreme Court on March 21, 2007.

In June 2007 a Moscow district court published a ban on the works of Said Nursi, a Turkish pacifist Islamic theologian. The ban, which was being appealed, was condemned by religious and human rights leaders. Ravil Gainutdin, Chairman of the Russian Council of Muftis, wrote an open letter to President Putin describing the Risale-i Nur ban as "a crude violation of freedom of conscience in our country." Vladimir Lukin, the Human Rights Ombudsman, denounced the ban, saying that that Nursi's works contained no trace of religious hatred or intolerance. In an open letter to the court, Lukin wrote that "It is very important that we do not allow interference in the convictions and beliefs of millions of citizens on the poorly grounded, unproven pretext of fighting against extremism, as this really could provoke wide-scale violations of their right to freedom of belief."

There has been a trend of senior Government officials showing support for those religious leaders who endorse them; this can lead to indirect discrimination. For example, in St. Petersburg, an Imam at Cathedral Mosque endorsed United Russia, which supported his plans for a second mosque in the city. At the same time, Muslims not part of Cathedral Mosque were unable to obtain permission to construct their own mosque in St. Petersburg. Governor Valentina Matviyenko noted in response to a letter of enquiry that this is in part because they are "in a state of conflict" with and "follow a different trend of Islam" from the Cathedral Mosque community.

Local authorities in St. Petersburg began an investigation of the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center, their national headquarters, even before the 2006 NGO law's implementing regulations were published. The authorities indicated that any irregularity they found would cause them to close the center. Federal and local authorities continued their investigations of the center in 2007. On February 16, 2007, the center wrote to the Prosecutor General's Office, expressing concern over the investigations, which had continued for more than 2 years. The St. Petersburg Prosecutor's Office, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman sent replies stating that the investigators had not exceeded their authority and had not violated the law.

The Government in practice gave preference to the ROC. Authorities permitted Orthodox chapels and priests on army bases. Protestant groups had more limited access to military facilities, while authorities largely banned Islamic services in the military and generally did not give Muslim conscripts time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Some recruits serving in the army reported that fellow servicemen insulted and abused them because they were Muslim.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although there are several laws addressing crimes motivated by ethnic or religious hatred, law enforcement agencies enforced these laws in an inconsistent, generally infrequent, and sometimes arbitrary manner.

Authorities rarely prosecuted or sentenced those arrested for attacks and vandalism against religious minorities, and they often failed to bring hate-crime charges even when religious bigotry was clearly involved. Some Government officials denied that there was a problem with hate crimes, or if they did exist, they were manifestations of economic ills. Some Government officials and human rights observers noted that, due to heavy caseloads, prosecutors chose to file easily proven charges of vandalism or hooliganism rather than risk an acquittal on the harder-to-prove hate-crime motive. The end result was that hate crime legislation was often not enforced.

The Government also used counter-terrorism to commit serious violations of religious freedom against the Muslim population. There were numerous cases of Muslims being prosecuted for extremism or terrorism even when they have no clear relation to such activities. These included individuals detained for possessing religious literature such as the Qur'an, or on the basis of evidence allegedly planted by the police. Some people suspected by local police of Islamic extremism allegedly were subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

According to human rights groups, a Supreme Court decision to ban 15 Muslim groups for alleged ties to international terrorism made it easier for officials to arbitrarily detain Muslims for alleged connections to these groups.

On May 24, 2007, during an interethnic brawl in Stavropol between hundreds of Russian and Chechen youths, Gelani Ayatev was badly beaten and soon after died of his injuries. Zaurbek Akhmadov, an eyewitness, said that riot troops and local police cheered on skinheads as they physically assaulted Ayatev, who had been handcuffed. Police then put Ayatev, still in handcuffs, and Akhmadov, who had been shot in the leg by police as he tried to help Ayatev, in the back of a police vehicle. According to Akmadov, the police refused to allow medical attention for Ayatev or Akmadov for more than an hour, and in response to Akhmadov's cries to help Ayatev and bring him to a doctor, the policemen answered "Don't worry. He won't be shouting Allah Akbar anymore."

In the case where a suspect threw a Molotov cocktail at a synagogue in Saratov in May 2007, police were investigating it as a case of "hooliganism" rather than as a hate crime, and had not apprehended any suspects. They declared it may not have been clear to the perpetrator that the building was a synagogue.

In Saratov at the beginning of April 2007, when a Jewish community member's home was targeted in an arson attack and graffiti reading "kikes to Israel" was written on a fence near the synagogue, police investigators classified these incidents as "hooliganism" and had not detained any suspects as of May.

In February 2007 the court gave light prison sentences to five teenagers who beat and fatally stabbed a Jewish man in October 2005, a murder motivated by ethnic hatred.

There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals who were publicly discussing their religious views, but usually authorities resolved these instances quickly.

On May 13 and 14, 2007 police arrested and detained 15 members of the Voskresenye Baptist community in Ivanovo, who were holding an event in a movie theater, distributing the New Testament and Book of Psalms. The organizers of the event had a written agreement with the theater. The reason given for the inspection appeared erroneous. The police tried to intimidate the detainees and urged them not to attend Baptist meetings, stating it was a "harmful sect."

On March 31, 2006, residents of Novaya Adygeia village were prevented from going to their mosque for Friday prayers. Police and Adygeia militia blocked all the roads into the village, stopped cars, and searched Muslims. According to the Maykop mosque imam, police officers also allegedly assaulted and apprehended a group of young Muslims, including the imam; masked policemen dragged the group to minibuses and took them to the Interior Ministry's Anti-Organized Crime Department. The policemen beat and questioned them about why they wore beards and observed Islamic norms of hygiene. After the Muslims were detained for a night in prison, officials took them before a judge who ordered their immediate release. The NGOs Memorial and SOVA reported that Government officials have harassed Muslims in Adygeia since summer 2005, including seizing religious literature, preventing congregants from attending Friday prayers, and warning them to stop attending the mosque.

A complicated case regarding the disruption of an April 2006 meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow was still pending. In April 2006 the Lyublino Police Department of Moscow disrupted a religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses, and officers detained and interrogated 14 male leaders of the congregation, taking their passports. Police refused to provide written reasons for their detention, reportedly physically assaulted their attorney Vitaly Sinyukov when he went to the police station

to assist them, and threatened him at knife-point not to file a complaint. In June 2006 a Moscow district court found the detention of the plaintiffs unlawful but dismissed the remainder of the suit because the Jehovah's Witnesses did not have legal permission to hold the meeting. Both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the police appealed the decision, and on March 22, 2007, the court reversed the June 2006 decision and ruled that the detention had in fact been lawful. The Moscow City Court refused to allow the ECHR judgment *Kuznetsov* v. *Russia* to be introduced as evidence in the case.

Vitaliy Sinyukov filed a suit against the Lyublino District Police Department. On April 20, 2006, the Lyublino District Court dismissed the complaint against the police without considering its merits. Sinyukov appealed, and on July 13, 2006, the Moscow City Court reversed the ruling and returned the case to the Lyublino District Court for consideration. On August 16, 2006, the Lyublino District Court again ruled to dismiss the case without considering its merits. Sinyukov appealed again, and on December 14, 2006, the Moscow City Court reversed the ruling in part and again returned the case to the Lyublino District Court for partial consideration of its merits. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

On December 24, 2006, local police and officials from the Chelyabinsk Emergencies and Youth departments raided a Pentecostal service at a private house in Argayash and demanded documents relating to the property and church. Police Colonel Ramil Galilullin told the press that the reason for the raid was a complaint by local citizens that children attended the Pentecostal church without parental permission. Following the raid, the authorities also conducted a fire inspection and fined the church for incorrect use of a stove and defective wiring. The Chelyabinsk region public prosecutor opened an investigation into the actions of the authorities in February 2007.

From July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2006, the courts convicted 46 Muslims, 29 of whom were in prison, for membership in Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Courts gave Anton (Abdullah) Stepanenko, an imam in Pyatigorsk (Stavropol Region), a suspended sentence, partially for inciting religious hatred. Stepanenko's lawyer maintained that he was not permitted to order a psychiatric assessment of a key witness with a long history of mental illness, or to cross-examine scholars responsible for an expert analysis which alleged that Islamic literature—with no proven link to Stepanenko personally—was extremist. Whereas criminal investigators reportedly claimed that Stepanenko was in possession of "Wahhabi" literature (a term widely and loosely used in the country to denote Islamic extremism), President Putin stated that "Wahhabism in itself does not pose any threat."

In February 2006 local police in Kabardino-Balkariya started compiling a list of "Wahhabis" by going to educational institutions and noting the names of students who prayed regularly. Under the new government in that region, however, pressure against Muslims seemed to diminish.

In October 2005, following a dispute between the ROAC and the ROC over the ownership of St. Olga's Church (see Restrictions section), three armed men beat and attempted to kidnap the ROAC Metropolitan from his home. The FSB reportedly interrogated and threatened several ROAC clergy and members following this incident.

Throughout 2005 tensions increased in Kabardino-Balkariya between Islamists and police. Police closed a large number of mosques, especially in areas declared "liberated" by Islamist militants. In October 2005, local militants joined Islamic militants loyal to the Chechen fighter Shamil Basayev and attacked and occupied government and police buildings in Nalchik. Several hundred militants were killed; many of the bodies have still not been returned to their families. Government officials said they arrested more than 60 persons on suspicion of participating in raids, while human rights groups claimed the number of detainees was higher and that most of them were not involved in the unrest.

Following the 2004 hostage-taking in Beslan, police stepped up activity in the North Caucasus. Authorities allegedly charged increasing numbers of Muslims, both Russian citizens and citizens of the predominately Muslim states bordering the country, with extremism. The NGO Memorial described 23 cases involving more than 80 individuals charged with extremism as "trumped-up." Of these, 18 resulted in verdicts, only 1 of which was an acquittal.

According to the Sova Center, on April 19, 2005, police briefly detained and interrogated nine female students in Kabardino-Balkariya for wearing the hijab and studying the Qur'an as a group.

While most detentions for religious practices were of Muslims, there were occasional reports of short-term police detentions of non-Muslims on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries for brief periods throughout the country or asked

them to cease their proselytizing activities, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes. During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported approximately 55 incidents, 21 of which took place in Moscow, in which authorities briefly detained their members or other citizens who were conducting lawful preaching activities.

In Vladimir Oblast, authorities inspected the property owned by the ROAC several times. In January 2006, FSB representatives seized about 20 files with documentation on ROAC ownership without informing ROAC leaders or giving any reasons.

There were no reports of religious prisoners in the country.

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.

Anti-Semitism

Racially motivated violent attacks against Jews decreased during the reporting period, despite an increase in racist violence targeting other ethnic groups. Anti-Semitism remained a serious problem, and there were several anti-Semitic attacks on persons and synagogues during the reporting period.

In September 2006, a court convicted of attempted murder and of inciting ethnic and religious strife, and sentenced to 16 years in prison, a man who stabbed eight persons during evening prayers in the Chabad synagogue in Moscow in January 2006. The assailant did not deny that anti-Semitism was a motive in his attack. The courts increased the 13-year sentence he received in April 2006 because it had not taken into account the extremist motive of the attack.

A student attempted a copy-cat attack on a synagogue in Rostov-on-Don in January 2006, but security guards stopped him before he could harm anyone. An appeals court overturned his attempted murder conviction on the basis that he was mentally unfit to stand trial, and ordered him to undergo psychiatric treatment.

On October 1, 2005, 21-year-old Andrey Dzyuba was killed by a gang of drunken teenagers in Yekaterinburg. The group yelled anti-Semitic insults at Dzyuba, dragged him to a cemetery, beat him, and killed him with a metal cross grave marker. Courts convicted five of the attackers of murder for reason of ethnic hatred, and gave them sentences ranging from five to 10 years in prison. Ten underage attackers who participated in the beating but not the murder were not charged due to their age.

According to the NGO Moscow Bureau of Human Rights (MBHR), the ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity (RNE) paramilitary organization continued to propagate hostility toward Jews and non-Orthodox Christians. The RNE appeared 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.

Some branches of the ultranationalist and anti-Semitic National Sovereign Way of Russia (NDPR) participated in events organized by local officials.

The primary targets of skinheads were foreigners and individuals from the North Caucasus, but they expressed anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments as well.

Vandals desecrated several synagogues and Jewish community centers during the reporting period, including in Saratov, Lipetsk, Borovichy, Murmansk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Taganrog, Samara, Petrozavodsk, Perovo, Baltiisk, Kurgan, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Tomsk, and Kaliningrad. Officials often classified the crimes as "hooliganism." In the cases where local authorities prosecuted cases, courts generally imposed suspended sentences.

In May 2007 Dmitry Levanov firebombed the Jewish center in Ulyanovsk and nailed a threatening note on its door with a knife. The next day he returned with a friend and threw a brick through its window. He was detained by police, tried in court, and given a 2-year suspended sentence for inciting ethnic hatred. His friend was released without being charged.

On May 5, 2007, an assailant threw a Molotov cocktail at a synagogue in Saratov. No suspects were apprehended. The police were investigating the arson as a case of "hooliganism" rather than as a hate crime. They stated it may not have been clear to the perpetrator that the building was a synagogue.

In the same town at the beginning of April 2007, a Jewish community member's home was targeted in an arson attack. Graffiti reading "kikes to Israel" was written on a fence near the synagogue. Police investigators also classified these incidents as hooliganism and had not detained any suspects as of May 2007.

On the night of March 18, 2007, vandals painted extremist phrases and swastikas on the walls of a synagogue in Voronezh. Officials initiated a criminal investigation on charges of vandalism and inciting extremist activity. The head of the Voronezh Jewish Community believed that the synagogue was attacked in response to the arrest of two young persons suspected of vandalizing a Jewish cemetery in Voronezh.

On the night of March 1, 2007, vandals desecrated a synagogue in Vladivostok and painted swastikas and anti-Semitic phrases on the walls of the synagogue. The synagogue was also vandalized on October 26, 2006.

On December 15, 2006, the Jewish Charity Center in Pskov reported that pepper spray was sprayed through a keyhole during its Hanukkah celebration. Police found no evidence of an attack but agreed to step up patrols when the Center was having public events.

In September 2006 unidentified persons threw stones at synagogues in Khabarovsk and Astrakhan, breaking several windows. One perpetrator threw a Molotov cocktail at the Astrakhan synagogue during this attack.

Vandals also desecrated several Jewish cemeteries and memorials during the reporting period.

On March 30, 2007, unknown vandals defaced seven grave markers in a Jewish cemetery in St. Petersburg with swastikas and graffiti. Police were investigating.

On March 29, 2007, unknown vandals spray painted swastikas and Fascist graffiti on a holocaust memorial in Kaliningrad. The local Jewish community chairman asked the prosecutor to investigate.

On March 6, 2007, vandals desecrated a Jewish cemetery in Voronezh, ruining more than 20 tombstones. Officials initiated a criminal case under article 244 of the Criminal Code—desecrating a cemetery.

Charges of "hooliganism" were quite common for crimes that would normally be considered bias crimes against a particular community, but prosecutors, even by governmental opinion, were reluctant to pursue aggravated charges of racial bias in crimes and were many times content with the lesser charge being applied. At times, there was a fear of not being able to win a court judgment of a bias crime.

There were many reports of anti-Semitic publications during the reporting period.

A number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers that print anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic articles, many of which appeared to violate the law against extremism, were readily available throughout the country. There were also reports of anti-Semitic literature on sale in cities across the country. The estimated number of xenophobic publications exceeded 100, many sponsored by the local chapters of the National Power Party. In addition, there were at least 80 Web sites in the country that disseminated anti-Semitic propaganda.

The Euro-Asian Congress noted that in 2006 prosecutors recorded the highest number of attempts to prosecute purveyors of anti-Semitic propaganda. While the Government has publicly denounced nationalist ideology and supported legal action against anti-Semitic acts, the reluctance of some lower-level officials to call such acts anything other than "hooliganism" remained an impediment.

In June 2007 a court in Novosibirsk sentenced the publisher of a local newspaper to 2 years in prison for inciting anti-Semitism. He had published articles that openly called for violence against Jews.

In April 2007, at a book fair in Moscow, police arrested a trader in extremist books and charged him with inciting ethnic, racial, and religious enmity. The police stated that they were seeking to identify the publisher of these materials.

Members of the State Duma and other prominent figures expressed anti-Semitic sentiments in a January 2005 letter, urging the prosecutor general to investigate Jewish organizations and initiate proceedings to ban them, charging that a Russian translation of ancient Jewish law, the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh, incited hatred against non-Jews. According to the ADL, in 2006 human rights organizations made numerous unsuccessful attempts to prosecute the authors of the "Letter of 500."

The Rodina party merged with the Party of Life and the Party of Pensioners to form the new "For a Just Russia" party in 2006. Rodina members with known anti-Semitic views generally did not approve of the merger and did not join the new party. "For a Just Russia" was led by Federation Council Speaker Sergey Mironov, who frequently spoke out against intolerance and anti-Semitism, including at a September 2006 visit to the Babiy Yar memorial in Ukraine.

In 2006 Nikolay Kurianovich, an LDPR Duma deputy, initiated and publicized a "list of the enemies of the Russian people," which mostly featured Jewish names. On March 7, 2007, aides to Kurianovich were expelled from the Duma chambers for wearing swastika armbands. Kurianovich declared their expulsion part of a "struggle against all that is Russian."

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, President Putin spoke several times on the need to combat interethnic and interreligious intolerance. The ROC hosted the World Summit of Religious Leaders in July 2006, including 200 leaders from 40 countries. The conference focused on political and social issues and included calls for interreligious tolerance. President Putin addressed the leaders and urged them to lead their congregations away from extremism.

On March 13, 2007, President Putin visited the Vatican and discussed with Pope Benedict XVI ways to improve relations between the ROC and Roman Catholic Church.

The LDS succeeded in registering 51 local religious organizations as of the end of 2006.

On December 12, 2006, a court affirmed the New Testament Church and the Perm Community of Evangelical Christians' title to the former Lenin Palace of Culture, providing an official certificate documenting the community's ownership of the facility, which they planned to use as a house of worship.

An Old Believer community in Samara regained its prerevolutionary church through a municipal decision during the reporting period.

Despite the prolonged series of investigations, Jehovah's Witness officials in St. Petersburg told consulate staff that the situation in Northwest Russia had improved. The officials said they had been able to engage in constructive dialogue with Government officials with regard to the general situation on religious freedom and the investigation of their Administrative Center.

In November 2006 the Permskiy Kray court ruled in favor of the Pentecostal Church, allowing the church to register its property, overturning several previous lower court decisions against the group. The Pentecostal group reported having received no official harassment since the resolution of the case.

In February 2007 a Sverdlovsk oblast court convicted five teenagers of the 2005 murder of a Jewish man, sentencing them to prison sentences ranging from 5 to 10 years. The teens were skinheads and members of extremist and Nazi-affiliated groups. The court acknowledged the anti-Semitic nature of the crime in its verdict, which came under Article 105, Section 2, "Ethnic or Religious Hate Crime."

Federal and regional officials participated actively in, and in many cases strongly supported, a range of Government and NGO-organized programs to promote tolerance. The December 2006 conference "A Multi-Ethnic Russia" was cosponsored by the Federation Council and UNESCO and included sessions on religious diversity and tolerance.

The Commission for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, a Government body headed by Vladimir Lukin, released its annual report on human rights and publicized the difficulty that some religious groups faced in property restitution and land acquisition, and the difficulties that religious minorities faced with Government officials.

The Public Chamber's Commission on Tolerance and Freedom of Conscience promoted tolerance in troubled areas, by holding a public hearing in March 2006 on how to promote stability and civil accord in the North Caucasus. Among the participants were government and religious leaders from the region.

Federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. In June 2006 work began on the construction of a $100-million Moscow Jewish community center on land donated by the Moscow city government to house Jewish community institutions including a school, a hospital, and a major new museum devoted to the history of the country's Jews, the Holocaust, and tolerance. The construction was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2008.

Evangelical Christian leaders in St. Petersburg reported important progress in obtaining federal permission to expand work with prisoners, in particular through its broadcasting network. With the cooperation of the ROC, satellite receivers were installed in dozens of prisons to allow broadcasting of programming that was broadly Protestant but tried to reach across denominations. The prison broadcasting program's stated goal was to provide inmates with an alternative to mainstream television.

ROC Patriarch Aleksiy II and spiritual leaders of Russian Muslims held an interfaith appeal for peace and joint efforts to counter ethnic and religious strife, following interethnic violence in the city of Kondopoga.

Despite the problems the Jehovah's Witnesses faced, church leaders said that their community grew by 3 percent (to 140,000) in the last year. Although in the past the Jehovah's Witnesses had difficulty securing large venues, they held an annual congress on July 14–16, 2006, at the Luzhniki Sports Complex in Moscow,

which more than 22,000 attended. The April 2007 Jehovah's Witnesses' Easter observances in Moscow proceeded without official or community disruption.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice, including some physical attacks against individuals and communities because of the victims' religious affiliation (see also the section on Anti-Semitism). Groups that monitor hate crimes reported at least 70 incidents of vandalism against religious targets, including 36 aimed at Jews, 12 against Russian Orthodox, and 11 against Muslims.

On April 9, 2007, the Stavropol court charged a suspect with murder on religious hatred grounds for the September 2006 killing of Imam Kurdzhiyev.

In February 2007 police charged suspects in the June 2004 killing of Nikolay Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. Girenko had served for many years as an expert witness in trials involving alleged skinheads and neo-Nazis.

On December 8, 2006, a hand grenade was thrown into the yard of the house of Ismail Berdiyev, Chairman of the Coordinating Council of Moslems of the North Caucasus. No one was hurt in the attack.

Russian Orthodox priest Andrey Nikolayev, his wife, and their three children were killed on December 2, 2006, when their house was set on fire. The motive for the arson and murder was not known, but media reported that a criminal group had threatened the priest in the past and had burned down his house in another village.

According to Jehovah's Witness officials, there were 5 incidents of physical attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses, and 11 incidents of police detention in the first half of 2007. In 2006 there were 24 physical attacks and 40 cases of police detention.

Many citizens believe that at least nominal adherence to the ROC is a part of Russian culture, and three other faiths—Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism—are widely considered "traditional religions." Terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya have given rise to negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Hostility toward non-Russian-Orthodox religious groups sparked harassment and occasionally physical attacks. Religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religions.

Some religious groups participated in interfaith dialogues. Pentecostal and Baptist organizations, as well as the ROC, were reluctant to support ecumenism at the local level, although the national leaders engaged each other at public forums during the reporting period. At the international level, the ROC has traditionally pursued interfaith dialogue with other Christian groups. In the Muslim-dominated regions of the Tatarstan republic and the surrounding Volga region, tensions between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers occasionally emerged. Law enforcement organizations closely watched Muslim groups. Officials often described Muslim charitable organizations as providing aid to extremists in addition to their overt charity.

A small splinter group of the ultranationalist Russian National Unity (RNE) organization called "Russian Rebirth" registered successfully in the past in Tver and Nizhniy Novgorod as a social organization, prompting protests from human rights groups; however, in several regions such as Moscow and Karelia, the authorities limited the activities of the RNE by denying registration to its local affiliates. According to Sova Center, there were neither registration denials nor registrations of RNE during the reporting period. Sova Center reported that three other ultranationalist organizations were dissolved in 2006. In one case, the Supreme Court upheld the decision by a Krasnodar court to ban the Krasnodar Orthodox Slavic community, an Orthodox Old Believers group that used neo-Nazi symbols.

On July 2, 2006, 15 shots were fired over a 15-minute period at the Trinikolsky monastery in the Dmitrovsky District of the Moscow Oblast. While no one was injured, the shots caused $12,000 in damage.

On August 27, 2006, an unknown attacker sprayed teargas, disrupting a Pentecostal church service in the "New Testament" Evangelical Church in the city of Perm.

Muslims continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some regions. After terrorists associated with Chechen, Ingush, and Islamic extremists seized a school in 2004 in Beslan, North Ossetia, interethnic and interreligious tensions resulting in discrimination persisted in the region without the authorities' intervention, according to NGOs. Muslims claimed that citizens in certain regions

feared 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 liberally labeled Muslim organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers were generally harmonious. Extremely traditional or orthodox versions of Islam were often associated in the public mind with terrorism and radical Muslim fighters in the North Caucasus.

Although the previous reporting period saw the chairman of the Council of Muftis, the head of the Central Spiritual Board of the country's Muslims, and the head of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus jointly denounce terrorism, the national press carried stories during the reporting period highlighting their public differences in attitudes toward Wahabbism, among other things.

As in the past, there were many attacks against houses of worship, meeting halls, and cemeteries across the country. Attacks ranged from threats and graffiti to arson. Often, even in the face of blatant anti-religious signs, local authorities investigated the cases as "hooliganism," and not under the stronger anti-hate laws, although there were signs that prosecutors were using the hate-crime laws more often. In April 2007 the Government amended the Criminal Code to increase punitive measures for hate crimes and extremism. According to new legislation, an individual convicted of committing an act of vandalism motivated by ideological, political, national, racial and religious hatred or enmity can be sentenced for up to 3 years.

Sova Center reported that 25 acts of vandalism motivated by religious hatred were committed against churches and other religious buildings in 2006, including 11 attacks on Muslim religious buildings. A mosque was bombed in Yahroma village of Moscow region. Mosques in Vladimir and Yaroslavl were attacked with Molotov cocktails.

On September 27, 2006, arsonists attempted to burn down a mosque in Yaroslavl by throwing six Molotov cocktails at the building. Vandals painted extremist phrases and swastikas on the outer wall of the mosque. Police arrested and charged an 18-year-old student with instigation of nationalist, racial, and religious hatred. There was another attempt of arson on the same mosque 3 days earlier. On December 25, 2006, the arsonists were convicted of desecration and arson; one was given a suspended sentence of 1 year and 3 months, and the other was sentenced to 10 months in a labor camp. The arsonists apologized publicly.

Emmanuel Moscow Evangelical Church reported an arson attack on their building in Solntsevo district of Moscow on the night of March 26, 2007. Also in March 2007, attackers threw bottles filled with resin at the front wall of Central Prayer House of the Christians of Evangelical Faith in Voronezh.

Sova Center registered 24 cases of vandalism in Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish cemeteries in 2006. On October 3, 2006, a group of skinheads desecrated approximately 150 Jewish and Tatar tombs in a cemetery in Tver. Extremist leaflets were found at the scene. A criminal case was initiated on charges of desecrating a cemetery.

On August 4, 2006, a Muslim cemetery was vandalized in Yekaterinburg. More than a dozen headstones, many of them of historic value, were destroyed. Police characterized the vandalism as hooliganism, not a hate crime, and Muslim community representatives in Yekaterinburg, including Imam Sibgatulla-Hazrat, agreed with this view.

During the reporting period, the tensions between the Vatican and the ROC notably decreased, although the Patriarchy in Moscow continued to object to the transfer of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic See from Lviv to Kiev, Ukraine, which occurred in August 2005. The press coverage of President Putin's March 2007 meeting with Pope Benedict XVI was positive, and Roman Catholic representatives noted a decrease in tensions during the reporting period. Other issues of concern that remained between the two groups included the continued belief that Roman Catholics were proselytizing in the country and a proposal by a local priest to open a Catholic Carmelite convent whose main mission would be to work with orphans in the city of Nizhniy Novgorod. The ROC alleged that the convent would serve as a base for missionary activities, while the Catholic Church maintained that the convent was not a full-fledged convent but a means for caring for local orphans. In April 2007 the Head of the ROC's Inter-Christian Relations Secretariat publicly criticized the Catholic Church for allegedly proselytizing at orphanages, calling their missionary activity "unacceptable."

Reports of the harassment of evangelicals and Pentecostals dramatically decreased during the reporting period, particularly after September 2005, when

Bishop Sergey Ryakhovskiy joined the Public Chamber. Nevertheless, African-Russian and African ministers of non-Orthodox Christian churches were subject to religious and racial bigotry.

According to a July 13, 2006, report by SOVA, an Orthodox priest and other activists attempted to interrupt a Baptist service in the village of Achit (Sverdlovsk region). They reportedly told persons walking by that the Baptists were a dangerous "sect." Police arrived on the scene and fined the Baptists for holding an "unauthorized meeting." Similar actions were reported against Pentecostals and Hare Krishnas.

The press routinely continued to reference members of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious "sect," although they have been present in the country for approximately 100 years.

In the past, Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported physical attacks against their members throughout the country. The officials were unable to update these figures for this reporting period, citing the difficulty of collecting the information.

A case at the ECHR continued 4 years after a provocative exhibit on religion was vandalized at the Sakharov Center. Although the authorities never prosecuted the vandals, a court found the Center Director and a staff member guilty of inciting religious hatred, and fined them. The case was being appealed at the ECHR.

During the reporting period, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice and a number of minority "nontraditional" religious leaders asserted that the Government and majority religious groups increasingly used the mass media, conferences, and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religions as threats to physical, mental, and spiritual health, asserting that these groups threatened national security. During the reporting period, television channels broadcast several programs about "dangerous cults and sects" and implied that these included Pentecostals and other proselytizing religions.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, religious groups, NGOs, and religious freedom advocates in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the consulates general in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok regularly raised reported violations of religious freedom with Government officials. The Embassy and Consulates worked with NGOs to encourage the development of cooperative programs designed to train 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 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 Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and MFA.

One position in the Embassy's political section was dedicated to human rights and religious freedom issues. This officer worked closely with other U.S. officers in Moscow and U.S. consulates around the country.

Consular officers routinely assisted U.S. citizens involved in criminal, customs, and immigration cases; officers were sensitive to any indications that these cases involved possible violations of religious freedom. U.S. officials raised such issues with the MFA and with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As U.S. missionaries and religious workers comprised a significant component of the local U.S. citizen population, the Embassy conducted a vigorous outreach program to provide consular services, to maintain contact for emergency planning purposes, and to inquire about the missionaries' experiences with immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with Government officials. He met with many religious leaders from Russia and the United States to discuss their concerns.

The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government on its adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the U.S. Department of State met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations, as well as with visiting representatives of local religious organizations, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering local religious organizations. The State Department's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism visited

during the reporting period and met with members of the Jewish community, Government, and human rights groups as well.

Members of the staffs of the U.S. consulates general in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg met with religious leaders from a range of denominations in several cities. For example, during this reporting period, the consulate in Yekaterinburg organized an ongoing dialogue with local religious leaders in order to better understand the region's views and concerns regarding religious tolerance and freedom of worship. Special effort was made to engage the region's Muslim community, and the Consul General discussed religious freedom with the Muslim leader of All Russia, resident in Bashkortostan. Consulate officials also reached out to the ROC, the Grand Mufti of Russian Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, Jewish community leaders, and Yekaterinburg's local Buddhist Center.

SAN MARINO

The law 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 37.57 square miles and a population of 30,000.

The Government does not provide statistics on the size of religious groups, and there were no census data providing information on religious membership; however, it was estimated that more than 95 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups include small numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, Muslims, Jews, and members of the Waldesian Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Although 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 three religious groups—the Waldesian Church, Baha'i Community, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

There are no private religious schools; the school system is public and state-financed. Public schools provide Catholic religious instruction; however, students may choose without penalty not to participate.

Epiphany, Saint Agatha, Easter, Corpus Domini, All Saints' Day, Commemoration of the Dead, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The country's role protecting religious minorities during World War II, including 100,000 total refugees, approximately 1,000 percent of the country's regular population at the time, is a source of pride for citizens and Government officials.

Catholicism is not a state religion, but it is dominant in society, as most citizens were born and raised under Catholic principles that form part of their culture. These principles still permeate state institutions symbolically; for example, crucifixes sometimes hang on courtroom or Government office walls. The country's dominant Catholic heritage may inform individual choices on lifestyle matters such as marriage or divorce, although there is no Government persuasion involved.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and has found the Government open to such discussions.

SERBIA (INCLUDES KOSOVO)

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the 2006 law on religion discriminates among religious groups and denies some groups their legal status. There is no state religion, but the majority Serbian Orthodox Church and other "traditional" religious communities received some preferential consideration.

Government respect for religious freedom continued to deteriorate because of the problematic law on religion and the Ministry of Religion's arbitrary execution of the law.

There were instances of discrimination and acts of societal violence directed against representatives of religious minorities. Leaders of minority religious communities reported acts of vandalism, hate speech, physical attacks, and negative media reports labeling them "sects," "satanists," or "deviants." Police and Government officials took positive steps in response to acts of hate speech and vandalism; however, investigations tended to be slow and inconclusive.

U.S. Embassy representatives continued to advocate for changes in the laws on religion and restitution that would rectify some of the discriminatory aspects of the legislation. The Embassy also continued projects to rebuild administrative offices of the Islamic communities in Belgrade and Nis that were heavily damaged by arson in 2004.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country (excluding U.N.-administered Kosovo) has an area of 30,000 square miles and a population of 7.5 million. Approximately 78 percent of the citizens are Serbian Orthodox, and 5 percent are Muslim, including Slavic Muslims in the Sandzak, ethnic Albanians in the south, and Roma located throughout the country. Roman Catholics comprise 4 percent of the population and are predominantly ethnic Hungarians and Croats in Vojvodina. Protestants make up 1 percent of the population. There is a Jewish population numbering between 2,000 and 2,400. In a 2002 census, 3 percent of Serbian citizens claimed to be nonbelievers or declined to declare a religion.

Approximately 100 foreign missionaries from several religious groups are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the April 2006 law on religion discriminates among religious groups and requires minority groups, including those that were previously recognized, to reregister through an invasive and burdensome procedure to attain or retain their status as recognized religious groups.

There is no state religion; however, the law on religion recognizes seven "traditional" religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Slovak Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Evangelical Christian Church, Islamic community, and Jewish community. The 2005 law on finance also recognizes only these seven religious groups and grants them tax exemptions. However, a case challenging the law was pending in the Constitutional Court at the

end of the reporting period, and the Minister of Religion informed several minority religious groups that they would not have to pay taxes.

The Government has not recognized most other Orthodox churches, despite attempts by the Macedonian and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches to gain recognition. The April 2006 religion law reinforces this unwillingness to recognize them by stipulating that the name of a religious organization cannot contain a name or part of a name of an existing registered group. For example, no group including the word "Orthodox" or "Evangelical" in its title could be registered, since those are already found in the names of the traditional churches. However, the Minister of Religion declared that the Government would recognize the Romanian Orthodox Church under the Serbian Orthodox Church, and that the Greek- and Latin-rite Catholic churches could be registered as one church.

Many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious communities, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission criticized the religion law. Many of the groups required to reregister had been recognized officially for more than 50 years and present for as long as 150 years. The registration requirements deemed invasive by the Council of Europe include submission of members' names, identity numbers, and signatures; proof that the religious group has at least 100 members; the group's statute and summary of its religious teachings, ceremonies, religious goals, and basic activities; and information on sources of funding. President Tadic, upon signing the legislation, declared that it was problematic and vowed to bring amendments to address the discriminatory aspects of the law but had not done so by the end of the period covered by this report.

Many minority religious groups reported confusion and irregularities after attempting to register with the Ministry of Religion. The Ministry sometimes failed to respond within the legal 60-day limit, and it advised some groups (such as the Hare Krishna community and the Adventist Reform movement) that they should register instead as "citizen associations" with the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government. The latter Ministry then advised the communities to register with the Ministry of Religion. Both groups remained unregistered at the end of the reporting period.

The Orthodox Church received preferential treatment beyond tax exemptions. The Government continued to collect money from postal charges for construction of a large Serbian Orthodox church and to subsidize salaries for Serbian Orthodox clergy working in Kosovo and internationally.

Students in primary and secondary schools are required to attend either classes from one of the seven "traditional" religious communities or a class in civic education. The proportion of students registering for religious education remained approximately equal to the proportion registering for civic education courses. Protestant leaders and NGOs continued to voice their objection to the teaching of religion in public schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, the police response to vandalism and other societal acts against religious groups rarely resulted in arrests, indictments, or other resolution of incidents. Some Government officials continued to criticize minority religious groups by referring to them as "sects," "satanists," and "deviants." In addition, Government actions made it difficult for Orthodox churches not recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church to operate, including the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church.

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, military personnel of other faiths may attend religious services outside their barracks and spend important religious holidays with their families. Because of cost considerations, the army has not implemented plans to meet Muslim soldiers' dietary requirements.

There was limited progress on restitution of previously seized religious property. A June 2006 law on restitution of communal and religious property recognizes claims for religious property confiscated in 1945 or later. Some religious groups—particularly the Jewish and Islamic communities, who lost land prior to 1945—expressed opposition to this benchmark. Although a Directorate for Restitution of Communal and Religious Property was formed in early 2007, it had not processed any claims by the end of the reporting period.

The Belgrade Islamic community reported continued difficulties in acquiring land and Government approval for an Islamic cemetery near the city. Religious organiza-

tions generally continued to report difficulty obtaining permission from local authorities to build new worship facilities.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Jewish leaders reported continued incidents of anti-Semitism, including small-circulation anti-Semitic books and Internet postings. The release of new books or reprints of translations of anti-Semitic foreign literature often led to an increase in hate mail and other expressions of anti-Semitism. The same sources associated anti-Semitism with anti-Western and antiglobalization sentiments as well as with nationalism.

Jewish leaders reported that historical monuments and cemeteries were routinely defaced and vandalized, although they claimed it was not due to anti-Semitism but rather a disregard and lack of restoration funds for these historical places nationwide.

Teaching of the Holocaust is incorporated into the school curriculum, and the role of the Government during that period is also discussed. However, there was a tendency among some commentators to minimize and reinterpret the role of Serbian leaders during the Holocaust, casting them as victims of foreign occupiers when in fact many leaders of that time collaborated with the Nazis and began campaigns against the Jewish population even before the Nazis invaded Yugoslavia. However, in December 2006 the country became an observer at the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite difficulties in reregistering, six "nontraditional" religious groups received legal status from the Ministry of Religion: the Seventh-day Adventists, United Methodist Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Evangelical Church of Serbia, Church of Christ's Love, and Christ's Spiritual Church.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

While relations between members of different religious groups were generally good, there were instances of discrimination against representatives of religious minorities in the country. Religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout the country, and in some cases it was difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin.

On March 28, 2007, in Stari Banovci, a man attacked two Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries and held them at gunpoint for nearly an hour. On April 10, 2007, the same person attacked one of the missionaries again. Police intervened in each case.

Minority religious communities continued to experience vandalism of church buildings, cemeteries, and other religious premises. Most attacks involved spray-painted graffiti; thrown rocks, bricks, or bottles; or vandalized tombstones. From December 16 to 19, 2006, unidentified attackers threw Molotov cocktails at the offices of the Evangelical church in Kraljevo and threw stones at the Baptist church and the Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Novi Sad. In October 2006 the Nis mosque was attacked and vandalized for the fourth time. Local police arrested four suspects, and an investigation continued at the end of the period covered by this report. Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses stated that an administrative center and several places of worship were vandalized. The Seventh-day Adventists reported that vandalism and arson attacks on their churches were too frequent to count. President Tadic publicly condemned the attacks and called on authorities to find the perpetrators; investigations were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

"Antisect" propaganda decreased slightly in the press, which labeled smaller, multiethnic Christian churches—including Baptists, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses—and other smaller religious groups as "sects" and claimed they were dangerous. The state-run RTS television station broadcast a program on Jehovah's Witnesses that described the teachings of the group as brainwashing and abusive. Religious leaders noted that instances of vandalism often occurred soon after press reports characterizing some religious groups as sects.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government continued to promote ethnic and religious tolerance throughout the country. U.S. Embassy officials met regularly with the leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and Government officials to promote respect for religious freedom and human rights.

The Embassy continued projects to help the Islamic communities in Belgrade and Nis rebuild facilities that were heavily damaged in 2004. Embassy officials worked with President Tadic, Prime Minister Kostunica, the Minister of Religion, leaders of religious communities, international organizations, and NGOs to advocate changes in the law on religion and the law on restitution of property of religious communities. The Embassy also counseled religious groups to report all incidents against their property or adherents to senior Government officials as a way to counter the often lackluster response by local police. Embassy officials continued to urge senior Government officials to speak out against incidents targeting ethnic minorities (including their places of worship and cemeteries) and to find and punish the perpetrators.

KOSOVO

The Constitutional Framework for the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo provides for freedom of religion, as does the new Law on Freedom of Religion in Kosovo; the U.N. Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) generally respected this right in practice.

Respect for religious freedom by the Government improved during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Societal violence decreased marginally, but tensions between communities remained high. Although societal discrimination and violence appeared to be generally ethnically motivated, the close link between ethnicity and religion made it difficult to determine if events were motivated by ethnic or religious animosity.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government intervened in specific cases to ensure that damage to Serbian Orthodox churches and other patrimonial sites was repaired. UNMIK, the NATO-led international peacekeeping force (KFOR), and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) provided security and protection arrangements for churches and patrimonial sites.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Kosovo has an area of approximately 4,211 square miles and a population of 2 million, although the last credible census was taken in the 1980s. Islam is the predominant faith, professed by most of the majority ethnic Albanian population; the Bosniak, Gorani, and Turkish communities; and some of the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian community, although religion is not a significant factor in public life. Religious rhetoric was largely absent from public discourse in Muslim communities, mosque attendance was low, and public displays of conservative Islamic dress and culture were minimal. The Serb population, estimated at 100,000 to 120,000 persons, is largely Serbian Orthodox. Approximately 3 percent of ethnic Albanians are Roman Catholic. Catholic communities are concentrated around Catholic churches in Prizren, Klina, and Gjakova. Protestants make up less than 1 percent of the population and have small populations in most cities, with the largest concentration located in Pristina. There are no synagogues or Jewish institutions; there are reportedly two families whose members have Jewish roots. The number of atheists or those who do not practice any religion are difficult to determine, and estimates are largely unreliable.

Missionaries are present. In May 2007 the Ministry of Public Services reported that 101 faith-based or religious organizations, whose goals included providing humanitarian assistance or faith-based outreach, worked in Kosovo.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Kosovo continued to be administered under the civil authority of UNMIK, pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244. In 2001 UNMIK promulgated the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo, which incorporates international human rights conventions and treaties, including those provisions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religion

and ethnicity; UNMIK and the PISG generally respected this right in practice. UNMIK, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the PISG officially promoted respect for religious freedom and tolerance in administering Kosovo and in carrying out programs for its reconstruction and development. UNMIK, as the final administrative decision-maker, sought to protect religious freedom in full.

In July 2006 the Assembly passed the Law on Religious Freedom, which the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General (SRSG) promulgated in August 2006. The law affirms the right to freedom of expression, conscience, and religion to all residents regardless of their religious convictions. It provides for the separation of religious communities from public institutions and for equal rights and obligations to all religious communities, and it stipulates that there is no official religion. The law also defines unique legal provisions that provide equal rights and obligations to all religious communities.

UNMIK recognizes as official holidays some but not all Orthodox, Islamic, and Catholic holy days, including Eid-al-Adha, Orthodox Easter Monday, the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Orthodox Assumption Day, Orthodox Christmas, and Western Christmas.

There are no mandatory registration regulations for religious groups; however, to purchase property or receive funding from UNMIK or other international organizations, religious groups must register with the Ministry of Public Services as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Religious leaders have complained that they should have special status apart from that of NGOs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

UNMIK, PISG, and KFOR policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, Protestants continued to report that they experienced discrimination in media access, particularly by the public Radio and Television Kosovo (RTK). Protestants also reported that Decani Municipality denied them permission to build a church facility on privately owned land they had purchased, citing negative reaction from local citizens, and that the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning upheld the decision. The legal case over issuance of the building permit was before the Supreme Court at the end of the period covered by this report. Protestants also reported that the lack of a tax exemption for importing donated charitable goods hindered their efforts.

Education legislation and regulations provide for a separation between religious and public spheres. Pursuant to a 2002 law requiring public education institutions to refrain from religious instruction or other activities promoting any specific religion, the Ministry of Education prohibited the wearing of headscarves. The Ministry continued to enforce this prohibition, particularly at schools with obligatory uniforms, despite a 2004 opinion issued by the Ombudsperson that the rule should apply only to teachers and school officials, not students. Following mediation by the Ombudsperson, a primary school student dismissed from class in April 2005 for wearing a veil completed her education through correspondence classes and received her diploma during the period covered by this report. The Ombudsperson reported that no new complaints of violations of religious rights were received during the year.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in Kosovo.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

In September 2006 UNMIK and UNESCO signed an umbrella Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on reconstruction and conservation of cultural heritage sites, including religious sites. In January 2007 SRSG Joachim Ruecker and UNESCO signed the first of several supplemental agreements under the MOU to allow UNESCO to go forward with the reconstruction and conservation of seven cultural heritage sites. The sites include the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in Lipjan/Lipljan, the St. Sava Church in Mitrovica, the Hadum Mosque in Gjakove/Djakovica, the Church of St. Archangel Michael in Shtime/Stimlje, the Budisavci Monastery in Kline/Klina, the mosque in Decan/Decani, and the "hamam" (Turkish bath) in Mitrovica.

In March 2007 the European Agency for Reconstruction signed a contract for the reconstruction of Bishop Artemije's official residence—the Episcopal Residence of Prizren—and the adjacent Orthodox Seminary. Construction began shortly thereafter and was expected to last approximately 12 months.

Throughout the period covered by this report, Kosovo officials and Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) religious leaders actively participated in status negotiations led by U.N. Special Envoy Ahtisaari. The negotiations related to the protection of Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage were considered to be among the most productive.

The multiethnic Reconstruction Implementation Commission (RIC) for Orthodox Religious Sites in Kosovo, funded by the PISG and chaired by the Council of Europe, continued to reconstruct religious sites damaged during riots in 2004. The RIC, considered one of the best examples of effective multiethnic cooperation in Kosovo, includes representatives from the SOC; the Kosovo Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport; Serbia's Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (IPM); and Kosovo's Institute for the Protection of Monuments. Having completed "emergency interventions" on 31 sites in 2005, the RIC's 2006 work program included extensive renovations on 8 sites identified as priority sites by the Serbian IPM. The PISG provided $2.9 million (€2.2 million) for these efforts. During the period covered by this report, the RIC completed extensive renovations on 8 of the 35 religious sites damaged in 2004, including reconstruction work at the Episcopal Church of St. George in Prizren and a perimeter wall around the destroyed Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary in Gjakova/Djakovica. The RIC planned to conduct extensive renovations on an additional 18 sites through 2007, including the reconstruction of at least 1 iconostasis, although its efforts were slowed by changes and disputes within the Serbian Government.

In October 2006 and April 2007, UNMIK renewed the Special Zoning Area (SZA) around Decani Monastery, which prohibits certain land uses, including commercial development and road construction. In December 2006 a nearby restaurant expanded its facilities in direct violation of SZA provisions. The owner eventually acquiesced to the dismantling of the new construction, but only after numerous direct interventions by international liaison offices with Kosovo Albanian central government and municipal leaders. In June 2007 the PISG, SOC leaders, and Decani municipality authorities agreed to ensure that a planned road to Montenegro near Decani Monastery would not pass directly through the Decani SZA or destroy the monastery's natural surroundings.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Societal violence continued but decreased marginally from the previous reporting period, although tension between communities remained high. On April 20, 2007, UNMIK reported that the number of potentially ethnically motivated cases remained low compared to the total number of cases. General crime statistics reported by UNMIK on March 9, 2007, revealed a 70-percent decline in potentially ethnically motivated crimes since April 2004.

Societal discrimination and violence appeared to be generally ethnically motivated, but the close link between ethnicity and religion made it difficult to determine if events were motivated by ethnic or religious animosity. While most Kosovo Albanians identify themselves as Muslim, the designation has a cultural more than religious connotation. Kosovo Serbs identify themselves with the SOC, which defines not only their religious but also their cultural and historical perspectives. Orthodox Christian and Catholic Kosovo Albanians faced no discrimination from their fellow Kosovo Albanians.

KFOR continued to protect Serbian Orthodox churches and other religious symbols. KFOR halted the process of transferring this responsibility to U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and KPS immediately following the 2004 riots and increased the number of checkpoints near Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries, and patrimonial sites. However, the transfer process resumed in 2005 and continued during the reporting period, with KPS conducting periodic mobile patrols around some sites. KPS officials noted that they had not assumed responsibility for the checkpoints primarily due to their lack of manpower and resources. Only three fixed KFOR checkpoints remained at Serb cultural sites, although security measures at Decani Monastery were increased after a shoulder-fired antitank weapon attack on the monastery on March 29, 2007. The Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement of U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari provides that responsibility for ensuring the safety of Kosovo's religious and cultural heritage shall belong to the Kosovo law enforcement agencies but adds that an International Military Presence will provide security for nine specific Serbian Orthodox sites, including Decani, in the post-status period.

There was a significant increase in the number of persons attending celebrations held at monasteries, with persons coming from throughout Kosovo and Serbia. However, security concerns continued to affect the Serb community and its freedom to

worship. Some Kosovo Serbs asserted that they were not able to travel freely to practice their faith. For example, in November 2006 Kosovo Albanians prevented Kosovo Serbs from visiting a Serb cemetery on a Serbian Orthodox holy day. According to police reports, a Kosovo Albanian used a tractor to prevent a bus carrying 50 internally displaced Serbs from Kosovo from entering the village of Leshane. According to the report, the tractor was eventually removed, but by then 60 to 70 villagers had gathered and would not allow the bus to proceed to the cemetery. Police later reported that the person who placed the tractor was detained and released pending charges.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reported incidents of rock-throwing and other assaults against Serbian Orthodox clergy traveling outside of their monasteries. In the eastern region and from Zociste and Orahovac towards Istok, clergy traveled freely without an escort. However, in the western municipalities of Peja, Decani, Djakovica, Istok, Klina, and Skenderaj and also in south Mitrovica (areas that include the monasteries of the Peja/Pec Patriarchate, Decani, Gorioc, Budisavci, and Devic), clergy requested and received KFOR escort. Clergy stated that they could not visit church members in the west (where the most important Serbian Orthodox holy sites are located) without an escort, and members cited threats to their security as impediments to their ability to visit holy sites. Monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly did not use parts of monastery property—often the land outside the monastery walls—due to safety concerns.

Problems at Serbian Orthodox religious sites continued, although in some instances it was difficult to determine whether an incident was motivated by ethnic tensions or criminal theft and greed. On June 6, 2007, the RIC reported that the lead roofing from St. Kyriaki Church in Prizren had been removed and that five minors had been detained as suspects. The RIC also delayed some final work on the Church of St. Nicholas in Pristina, which was vandalized in January 2007, until security on the site improved.

On March 29, 2007, unidentified assailants fired a rocket-propelled grenade at Decani Monastery. Although it failed to detonate, it damaged the exterior wall separating the monastery grounds from surrounding fields. After the attack the leader of a local Kosovo Albanian war veterans association published a letter blaming the Decani monks for the attack and describing the SOC as "a known pillar of the Serbian state." The mayor of Decani and government officials condemned the attack and visited the monastery to express their support. The Ministry of Interior offered a $12,000 (€9,000) reward for information leading to apprehension of the perpetrators. On May 4, 2007, KPS named a suspect in the incident, provided a physical description, and requested public assistance in apprehending him; however, KPS had not arrested anyone by the end of the period covered by this report.

On March 28, 2007, KPS representatives at the cultural heritage standards meeting reported 17 incidents of suspected vandalism at cultural heritage sites in the first quarter of 2007.

KPS reported that on March 18, 2007, three unidentified masked men robbed the Catholic church in Binqe/Binca Village, Vitina/Viti Municipality. Two Kosovo Albanian priests were assaulted in the robbery, one of whom sustained facial injuries after being hit with a gun. The Government issued a statement deploring the incident and appealed for citizens to help the authorities apprehend the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

On March 5, 2007, unknown perpetrators burglarized and vandalized the Church of St. John, also in Peja. After inquiries by the international community, the municipality agreed to repair the church and also to work with KPS to stop further vandalism and speak out publicly against the crime.

Also in March 2007, municipal authorities attempted to halt the construction of an outer gate and security wall at the Peja/Pec Patriarchate in the west, citing the lack of a construction permit. After extensive intervention by central government authorities and foreign diplomats, an agreement was reached whereby the patriarchate, listed as a UNESCO world heritage site, would submit a construction permit to UNMIK, which would in turn send it to Peja municipal authorities for approval. At the end of the period covered by this report, approval was pending. The Peja mayor continued to make statements to the press threatening unilateral action to stop construction of the wall. In contrast, Mufti Ternava, leader of the Kosovo Islamic Community, responded by traveling to Peja's Kursumli Mosque in early June 2007 to make a special address, emphasizing the importance of practicing interreligious and interethnic tolerance even under difficult circumstances.

On September 20, 2006, an assailant threw fuel near the entrance of the Serbian Orthodox cemetery in a multiethnic village near Gniljane. On August 16, 2006, a Kosovo Albanian teenager was arrested while stealing copper roofing materials from the Orthodox church in Ferizaj/Urosevac. On August 6, 2006, thieves broke into the

Orthodox church in Babin Most, Obilic Municipality, stole several icons, and damaged the interior of the church.

The unfinished Orthodox Church of Christ the Savior remained empty on University of Pristina grounds. No new plans to finish construction were announced during the reporting period.

The RIC sought donors to fund additional security measures at 15 high-risk reconstructed churches, including the installation of video surveillance equipment and/or security guards. The RIC coordinated the proposal for additional security measures with KPS, who agreed to monitor the video footage 24 hours per day. The proposal states that although security efforts had been successful to that point, "in the increasingly difficult political climate, cooperation is becoming more fragile" and ongoing security incidents at reconstructed sites would give those who oppose the process "opportunities to withhold participation."

KFOR deployed security contingents to religious sites throughout the region. In areas of improving security conditions and decreasing interethnic tensions, KFOR removed static checkpoints from many churches and religious sites and relied instead on CIVPOL and KPS patrols. In most cases such changes in security measures did not result in a decrease in the level of safety of, or access to, the religious sites.

Although Protestants previously reported a slight improvement in their situation, they reported suffering more violence and discrimination during the reporting period. They alleged discrimination through verbal attacks and exclusion from interfaith initiatives by the religious leadership, who defended their actions on the grounds that Protestants are not considered a "traditional" religion in Kosovo. Protestants also stated that the public television station RTK did not specifically report on the Protestant religion. Protestants reported improvement in the attitude of some school officials towards Protestant students. Additionally, they reported no break-ins at churches or opposition to showing a Christian movie in villages. However, individual adherents reportedly experienced harassment.

Catholic leaders reported that they had good relations with the Muslim community but little bilateral contact with the SOC leadership. Catholic and SOC leaders believed each other to be highly politicized. The Muslim community also reported good relations with the Catholic leadership but limited interaction with the Orthodox community. A planned follow-on to the May 2006 interfaith conference hosted by Norwegian Church Aid was stalled in the planning phase due to the reluctance of the SOC leadership to participate.

There were a few incidents directed against the majority largely Muslim, ethnic Albanian population. KPS reported that a hand grenade was found in the Han-i-Elezit mosque on February 22, 2007. Its fuse was partially burned, but it failed to detonate. Police reported that conservative Muslims angry about the president of the Islamic Community's decision to rent out space in the mosque to local shopkeepers may have been responsible. On October 23, 2006, Kosovo Albanians visiting the Muharem Mitrovica city cemetery in Peja on the first day of the Fiter Bajrami feast found an explosive device on one of the graves. KPS also reported an explosion on August 17, 2006, in a Kosovo Albanian graveyard that damaged a grave and nearby property.

Muslim, Catholic, and some local Orthodox leaders attempted to encourage tolerance and peace in the religious and political spheres.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the U.N. Special Envoy for the Kosovo status talks, UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives and sought to promote ethnic and religious tolerance. Religious freedom continued to be a critical issue in the resolution of Kosovo's final status, both for the long-term viability of the Serb community as well as for the security of Serbian Orthodox religious sites. U.S. officials also maintained close contacts and met regularly with religious leaders of the Serbian Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities to discuss their concerns and to promote interfaith dialogue. Mufti Ternava, leader of the Kosovo Islamic Community, visited the United States on a Voluntary Visitors program in April 2007.

U.S. officials continued to urge dialogue between members of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and ethnic Albanian members of the PISG. The U.S. Government continued to support UNMIK and the PISG in rebuilding religious buildings damaged in the 2004 interethnic riots and to intervene actively with PISG officials on behalf of SOC interests when SOC rights were threatened or violated. U.S. KFOR peacekeeping troops worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo and guarded religious sites.

The U.S. Government remained actively engaged with UNMIK, whose goal is to secure peace, facilitate the return of the displaced, lay the foundations for democratic self-government, and foster respect for human rights regardless of ethnicity or religion. The U.S. Department of State continued to fund 220 American police officers assigned to UNMIK's civilian police contingent and provided substantial support to KPS, both of which worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence. U.S. diplomats worked with U.S. military personnel assigned to KFOR to protect religious sites in the U.S. military's area of responsibility and actively promoted efforts to reconstruct damaged or vandalized churches. U.S. government representatives intervened to protect the integrity of the Decani SZA and encourage repair of St. John's Church in Peja. The U.S. Government granted one million dollars to UNESCO's large-scale effort to preserve cultural heritage in Kosovo. For the period from September 2006 to August 2007, the Department of State committed $3.8 million in funding for programs for returning Muslim and Orthodox Roma, Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Bosnians, and other minority communities who fled ethnic violence in the aftermath of the 1998–99 conflict.

Many high-level U.S. government and military officials continued to visit in conjunction with the final status process and met with political and religious leaders to assess the situation and urge reconstruction and progress toward a multiethnic Kosovo.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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

An amendment to the religious registration law that became effective in May 2007 toughened the requirements for a religious group to register. While a religion need not be registered for its members to practice their faith, recognition through official registration affords religious groups certain benefits, including monetary and administrative assistance, to which unregistered religious groups are not entitled. These practical administrative aspects are further complicated by legal restrictions on alternative forms of organization, such as creating nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civic associations, which are forbidden from promoting any religion or performing religious services.

There were limited reports of societal discrimination based on religious belief. Periodic acts of anti-Semitism persisted and anti-Islamic sentiment appeared to be growing among some elements of the population.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 18,900 square miles and a population of 5.4 million. 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 have been in part due to greater willingness among persons to state their affiliation, in contrast to 1991 immediately after the fall of communism. According to the census, there are 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 (0.9 percent), and 20,630 members of Jehovah's Witnesses. There are also 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. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Baha'is, which were registered in October 2006 and April 2007, respectively, have several hundred adherents each. Estimates of the Muslim population, including immigrants and international students, vary from 1,200 to 5,000. The 2001 census showed that 13 percent of the population claims no religious affiliation and that 3.5 percent are undecided.

There were 3 categories of nonregistered religions that comprised approximately 30 groups: nontraditional religious groups, such as 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; religious societies termed "syncretic" by the Government, such as the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, and the Movement of the Holy Grail; and Chris-

tian religious societies, such as the Church of Christ, Manna Church, International Association of Full Gospel Businessmen International, Christian Communities, Church of the Nazarenes, New Revelation, Word of International Life, Society of the Friends of Jesus Christ, Sword of the Spirit, Disciples of Jesus Christ, Universal Life, Free Peoples' Mission, Presbyterian Church Emmanuel, and Brothers in Christ (Christadelphians). There are very small numbers of refugees and migrants who practice faiths different from those of the majority of native-born citizens.

Missionaries are active in the country.

There is some correlation between religious differences and ethnic or political differences. The Christian Democratic Party, which has ties to the Catholic faith, is the only political party to advocate an explicitly religious agenda. The Slovak Democratic Christian Union is a Christian democratic party similar to those found in many western European countries.

Followers of the Orthodox Church live predominantly in the eastern part of the country. The Ruthenian minority are primarily Greek Catholics with some 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 throughout the country.

The most recent (2002) polling data revealed that the number of religious practitioners continued to increase after the fall of communism and that approximately 54 percent of Catholics and 22 percent of Lutherans actively participated in formal religious services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 generally observed and enforced 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. The law does not prohibit the existence of nontraditional religious groups. It allows the Government to enter into agreements with religious communities. The law was applied and enforced in a nondiscriminatory fashion.

Governmental entities at all levels, including the courts, interpreted the law in a way that protected religious freedom.

No official state religion exists; however, because of the numbers of adherents, Catholicism is considered the dominant religion. In 2001 the Government signed an international treaty with the Vatican, which provides the legal framework for relations between the country's Roman Catholic Church, the Government, and the Vatican. Two of four proposed corollaries to the framework treaty, including one regarding military service in the chaplaincy for priests and another regarding religious education, were later approved and signed into law. 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 religious groups. This agreement with the other groups 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. The corollary agreement on religious education, identical versions of which were signed with the 11 other registered religious groups, mandates that all public elementary schools require children to take either a religion class or an ethics class, depending on their (or their parents') preference. Despite some concerns, smaller churches reiterated that they were generally pleased with the system.

Registration of religious groups is not required, but only registered religious groups have the legal right to build places of worship and conduct public worship services and other activities. Those that register receive Government benefits, including subsidies for clergymen; office expenses; the right to visit, proselytize, and minister to their members in prisons and hospitals; and access to public television broadcasting—privileges which unregistered religious groups do not receive. The Roman Catholic Church, being the largest religious group, receives the largest share of Government subsidies. 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 group may elect not to accept the subsidies.

The Cabinet decided on June 12, 2007, to increase by 7 percent salaries for clergy from registered groups who perform religious rites and services and who serve religious communities. Some groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Baha'is, refused to accept the financial support, preferring to keep their independent status. Additionally, it was easier for newly registered groups to gain approval if they announced they would not request the state subsidy. During the period covered by this report, 2 religious groups, the Mormons in October 2006 and the Baha'is in April 2007, were registered, bringing the total number of registered religious groups in the country to 18. Christian Fellowship filed for registration prior to the new law, but on June 22, 2007, the Minister of Culture rejected the application. Christian Fellowship leaders planned to appeal the decision, claiming that they complied with all the requirements, while the Ministry defended the rejection by negative references from some reviewing institutions. No new religious groups filed for registration after the stricter requirements went into effect in May 2007.

According to the newly amended registration law, to register a religion, 20,000 members of the group who are permanent residents must submit an "honest declaration" attesting to their membership, knowledge of articles of faith and basic tenets of the religion, personal identity number and home address, and support for the group's registration. The previous law allowed for registration based on a petition of 20,000 permanent residents who supported the registration, or in practice simply supported religious freedom, and were not required to be members of the faith.

The General Prosecutor, who had filed a suit with the Constitutional Court in 2004 on the grounds that the previous religious registration law was unconstitutional, filed an amendment to his suit in 2007 and continued to argue that the new version of the religious registration law is also unconstitutional. On June 20, 2007, Prosecutor General Dobroslav Trnka announced his intention to file a complaint at the Constitutional Court against the new law on church registration, claiming that the law is discriminatory and violates freedom of association. The Constitution allows the state to restrict the freedom of association only in exceptional cases, such as when state security is threatened. He claimed that there is no serious and convincing reason for such an intervention into the freedom of assembly or any theoretical or real reason to presume that small religious communities could threaten basic democratic freedoms.

In March 2007 a Member of Parliament (MP) from the Slovak National Party (SNS), one of the three parties in the Government coalition, stated that the purpose of the stricter religious registration requirements was to prevent "our children going to a mosque to pray and professing that we are al-Qaeda." Reportedly, one of the main reasons for the amendment was to prevent uncontrolled registration of new religious groups, often considered to be harmful sects that could spread dangerous ideas and claim subsidies from the state budget.

The 14 religious groups established before the registration law passed in 1991 were exempt from the membership requirements. Although the Nazarene and the Muslim communities existed in the country prior to 1991, they were never properly registered and thus were not given registered status under the 1991 law. At the end of the period covered by this report, other groups that had not registered were the Moonists, Movement of the Holy Grail, Word of Life, and several others. The four religious groups registered since 1991 are the Jehovah's Witnesses, New Apostolic Church, Mormons, and Baha'i Community.

The explanatory documents of the amendment claim that religious minorities who do not satisfy the requirements may register under the law governing Citizens Associations. According to the NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers, this is not accurate, because the act governing registration of citizens associations specifically excludes religious organizations and churches. Additionally, a separate instructional document which the Ministry of Interior issues to potential filers confirms that it will reject an application from a religious group.

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 made inquiries into obtaining registration might find funding from the Department of Minority Culture.

There is no specific licensing or registration requirement 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.

Most religious groups had few remaining claims regarding property taken during the Nazi and Communist regimes. The main exception was the Reformed Christian

Church, which had claims for approximately 70 church premises nationalized by the Communist government.

Several religious holy days 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 state holidays.

The Department of Church Affairs at the Ministry of Culture oversees relations between religious groups and the state and manages the distribution of state subsidies to religious groups and associations. However, the Ministry cannot intervene in the internal affairs of religious groups and does not direct their activities. The Ministry administers a cultural state fund, "Let's Renew Our House," which allocates money for the upkeep of cultural and religious monuments.

The Government continued to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding by supporting events organized by various religious groups. The state-supported Ecumenical Council of Churches promotes communication within the religious community. Most Christian churches have the status of members or observers in the Council. The Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic (UZZNO) was invited and participates in its activities.

The Holocaust Documentation Center (DSH) continued to organize seminars, cosponsor programs, and provide instructional material about the Holocaust, particularly for teachers. The DSH also sent teachers on excursion trips to Holocaust sites. In September 2006 the DSH held a seminar entitled "Activities of an Illegal Jewish Labor Group in the War-time Slovak State" with the Jewish community.

As in previous years, the Ministry of Education continued to host seminars and programs for teachers related to the history of Judaism in the country.

In addition, during the reporting period the Institute for Church-State Relations organized several conferences on topics, such as alternative curative methods affiliated with religions, religion in Japan, and the history of church funding in the country.

In 2007 the Institute for National Memory continued its work of publishing documents related to crimes committed by the state during World War II and the Communist era. In January the Institute published the statistical data of the number of Jews living in all municipalities across the country compiled in 1942 as part of the preparation to deport Slovak Jews to Nazi concentration camps. During the reporting period, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum continued multiple cooperative programs, such as providing expert technical advice and sharing data, with the Institute. Starting in 2005 the Institute began publishing on the Internet the list of liquidated companies and the names of Slovaks who organized the liquidation of Jewish property during World War II. The institute planned to release the list of "aryanizers" by the end of 2007.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Although Government support was provided in a nondiscriminatory manner to registered religious groups that seek it, the requirement that a registered organization have 20,000 members disadvantaged smaller religious groups. Lack of registration means that a religious group cannot form a legal entity and therefore cannot, for example, purchase land to build a house of worship or open a bank account to accept donations. In practice, unregistered religious groups were generally able to function in spite of these obstacles. Members of unregistered religious groups may have difficulty gaining access to their clergy and other resources in limited situations. For example, clergy from unregistered religious groups may not conduct official visits to minister to their members in prison and Government hospitals. Occasionally, members of unregistered religious groups were prevented from burying their relatives in municipal cemeteries.

The Institute of State-Church Relations monitors and researches religious "cults" and "sects"; however, it was difficult to identify these groups because they largely register as NGOs rather than as religious groups. Additionally, groups are not formally defined as sects because the term is not considered a legal one. The Institute researches groups such as the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church. The Institute conducted seminars, issued publications, and provided information to the media regarding its findings. The Institute's budget came mainly from the Ministry of Culture's general fund, although it 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, engaged in similar work.

Some property restitution cases remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report. Property confiscated by the Communist government which was restituted in accordance with the law on the restitution of communal property, ena-

bling all religious groups to apply for the return of their property confiscated by the Communist government, was returned in its existing condition. The Government did not provide any compensation for the damage done to it during the previous regime. Thus churches, synagogues, and cemeteries have been returned mostly in poor condition, and religious groups often lacked the funds to restore these properties to a usable condition. The property was returned by the Government, municipalities, state legal entities, and, under certain conditions, by private persons. The deadline for restitution claims was December 31, 1994.

In some cases, although the Government legally returned a property, it was not vacated by the former tenant, often a school or hospital with nowhere else to go. There were also problems with the return of property that was undeveloped at the time of seizure but was subsequently developed. The main obstacles to the resolution of outstanding restitution claims were the Government's lack of financial resources and bureaucratic resistance on the part of those entities required to vacate restitutable properties.

In 2005 a new restitution law permitted religious organizations to claim property taken between May 8, 1945, (November 2, 1938 for the Jewish community) and January 1, 1990, and established April 30, 2006, as the filing deadline. With the exception of the Reformed Christian Church, religious groups had few remaining claims for unreturned property. Several religious institutions noted that they could not provide precise data on the few outstanding claims since many of their branches operated somewhat independently. The Reformed Christian Church has been vocal regarding its unfulfilled restitution claims. According to its representatives, the new law addressed some complex property claims but did not resolve the cases of approximately 70 church premises (church schools, teachers' facilities, etc.) that were owned by individual parishes and nationalized by the Communist government after 1948. Reformed Christian Church officials also complained that the Government did not allow church organizations to draw from European Union structural funds for social purposes.

The Orthodox Church reported that all of its claims had been settled, while the Catholic Church reported that more than half of the property that it had claimed had been returned. The Catholic Church had not received any compensation for the remaining 40 percent of claims, since the properties were undeveloped at the time of nationalization but were developed later. The Church also is not eligible to reacquire lands that originally were registered to church foundations that no longer exist or operate in the country, such as the Benedictines.

In March 2007 the state-run Jewish Museum and the Bratislava City Government resolved a dispute from a 2004 request from the city that the Museum pay market-rate rent, which it could not afford, or face eviction. The Ministry of Culture facilitated a tri-party building and land ownership exchange among the National Opera, National Museum, and Jewish Museum. All parties were satisfied with the outcome.

During the period covered by this report, the 2002 compensation package between the Government and the Jewish community for heirless property owned by Jewish families before the Holocaust was completed.

There was no progress in the lawsuit UZZNO filed against Germany to reclaim compensation for monies paid by the wartime Slovak government to Germany to cover the cost of Germany's deportation of 57,000 members of the country's Jewish population.

Per a corollary to the Vatican treaty, a 2004 law requires public elementary school students to take either a religion or ethics class. Critics claim that students in some schools, particularly in poor, rural communities, are not given a choice or are pressured to choose the religious classes. The law also allows Government-funded religious schools to remove teaching materials not consistent with students' religious beliefs.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In Trnava on September 22, 2006, local police told 12 Mormons who were gathering signatures for a petition to register to stop their activity and leave the city. The signature collectors departed peacefully and did not file a formal complaint. Trnava city officials stated that the police instruction stemmed from citizens' complaints of harassment. Members of the Mormon Church did not experience police or any other official intimidation in the approximately 30 other cities where they conducted their petition drive. One Mormon representative noted that police in another city had upheld the right of the signature gatherers when questioned by a local resident.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism persisted among some elements of society, manifested occasionally in incidents of violence and vandalism. An estimated 500 to 800 active neo-Nazi members and 3,000 to 5,000 sympathizers operated in the country and committed serious offenses; however, only a small number of the abuses were 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.

During the reporting period, extreme-right nationalist and neo-Nazi groups, including Slovenska Pospolitost (Slovak Community) and Narodny Odpor (National Resistance), held numerous public rallies in support of the World War II-era Fascist Slovak state and its leader Jozef Tiso, responsible for sending thousands of Slovak Jews to their death in Nazi concentration camps. The neo-Nazi groups also held events to support public figures who openly praised Tiso and to protest against other ethnicities and lifestyles. Police intervened when such rallies and events turned violent. As in past years, rallies took place in March 2007 on the anniversary of the Fascist state and on Tiso's birthday. A leading SNS MP participated in a public commemoration for the WWII Slovak state, which took place at Tiso's gravesite, on March 14, 2007. Other rallies occurred in August 2006 and in February, April, and May 2007.

In December 2006 Archbishop of Bratislava-Trnava Jan Sokol praised Jozef Tiso during a media interview and stated that the country enjoyed a period of well-being under Tiso's leadership. The public outcry over the incident resulted in Prime Minister Robert Fico reaffirming that Tiso was a war criminal.

The number of prosecutions for racially motivated crimes, although still low, continued to increase as a result of the creation of a specialized police unit, the placement of an advisor in the Bratislava Regional Police, and increased training. In 2006 police investigated 188 cases of racially motivated attacks and public support for ideologies that suppress the rights of others. A total of 107 investigations resulted in prosecutions, although the number of convictions was not available. Because of the monitoring unit and its NGO advisory board, police were better trained in identifying neo-Nazi members and more informed about their activities. The Ministry of Interior assigned specialists on hate crimes to each of the country's eight regions.

Multiple Jewish cemeteries were desecrated during the period covered by this report. In August 2006 unidentified persons overturned gravestones in a Jewish cemetery in Ruzomberok. That same month vandals painted swastikas on graves at a Jewish cemetery in Rajec. In these cases police opened investigations but did not find the culprits. As of December 2006, both investigations were closed.

Vandals regularly spray-painted anti-Semitic slogans and toppled or broke gravestones. In most cases police caught the adolescent vandals, who were sentenced to pay for at least part of the repairs. Jewish community leaders stated they were satisfied with the Government's response to these incidents, and they did not believe that the communities supported this vandalism.

The Government continued implementing an action plan to fight discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were limited reports of societal discrimination based on religious belief.

Anti-Islamic sentiment was apparent during the reporting period. Members of the Muslim community believed that the stricter religious registration requirements were also aimed at them and claimed they faced general harassment within society. Experts on racism reported a growing atmosphere of acceptance for public displays of intolerance after the SNS joined the governing coalition in July 2006. In May 2007 the ultranationalist party Slovenska Pospolitost organized a demonstration against Turkey joining the European Union, with speeches denouncing the spread of Islam in Europe.

In March 2007 a prominent SNS MP said that "we don't want to run around in turbans on Slovak soil" and, in reference to Afghanistan, that "anyone who thinks that they can democratize those lunatics in turbans is terribly naive."

Anti-Semitic sentiments persisted as well. Neo-Nazis held numerous public rallies, there were several reports of vandalism of Jewish cemeteries and other prop-

erties, and public figures occasionally expressed anti-Semitic viewpoints (see Anti-Semitism).

In September 2006 Catholic bishops reportedly urged Catholics to not support the registration of the Mormon Church in the country, saying it would betray the Catholic Church. Members of other religious groups with few adherents in the country described incidents of prejudice and harassment, generally small in scale and not obviously religious discrimination. Such incidents included having an apartment lease for missionaries revoked, being turned down to rent a hall for a religious gathering, and physical shoving during a petition drive for religious registration.

Few communication problems existed among the major religious groups, and there were several ecumenical organizations that fostered closer relationships. The Ecumenical Council of Churches operated and represented several 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 maintained contacts with a broad spectrum of religious groups and hosted an interfaith roundtable discussion in April 2007. The Embassy encouraged tolerance for minority religious groups. Embassy officers and official visitors met with officials of major and minor religious groups to discuss property restitution issues as well as human rights conditions and religious freedom. In February 2007 the U.S. Ambassador spoke with the parliamentary Human Rights Committee on the subject of religious tolerance, specifically urging acceptance of a broader range of religions under the religious registration law.

While Parliament was considering the legislation to make religious registration requirements stricter, Embassy officers met with numerous MPs from coalition and opposition political parties to criticize the tougher registration requirements and to urge greater respect for religious freedom. The Embassy hosted numerous discussions and events focusing on the need for the country to lower its numerical threshold for religious registration to better correspond with OSCE standards. The Ambassador delivered a strong message to Archbishop Sokol on the registration issue. The Embassy publicly expressed U.S. opposition to the numerical threshold, and the Ambassador raised the issue with the Minister of Culture and other Government officials.

The Embassy also continued its dialogue with the Conference of Bishops, the Ecumenical Council of Churches, the Federation of Jewish Communities, the Orthodox Church, and other religious groups. The Embassy had good relations with the Ministry of Culture and fostered an effective dialogue between religious groups, the Ministry of Culture, and the Commission for the Preservation of U.S. Heritage Abroad on matters of importance to the commission.

Embassy officers aided the Government in its membership in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research and the initiation of a liaison project on Holocaust education in cooperation with the task force. Embassy officers continued to be active in perpetuating the project.

Embassy officers met regularly with members of the Muslim community, which continued to face difficulties organizing and constructing a mosque, in part due to local bias. Embassy officials also made tolerance and diversity the subject of speeches during outreach trips. The Embassy hosted several public events highlighting Slovak assistance and cultural outreach to Muslim countries.

SLOVENIA

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

There were minor reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 7,827 square miles and a population of 1,960,000. According to the 2002 census, 58 percent of the population is Roman Catholic (1,135,626), 2 percent Muslim (47,488), 2 percent Orthodox (45,908), and 1 percent Evangelical (14,736). Groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include "other Christians" (1,877), "other Protestants" (1,399), "Oriental" religions (1,026), "other religions" (558), agnostics (271), and Jews (99). Three percent of the population classified themselves as "believer, but belonging to no religion" (68,714). Ten percent classified themselves as "unbeliever/atheist" (199,264); 16 percent gave no reply (307,973), and 7 percent are "unknown" (139,097).

The Orthodox and Muslim populations appear to correspond to the immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively. These groups tended to have a lower socioeconomic status.

Foreign missionaries operated without hindrance.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. People are prohibited from inciting religious discrimination and inflaming religious hatred and intolerance.

A new Religious Freedoms Act entered into force on March 3, 2007, replacing the 1976 law on religious communities. The law codifies the Government's respect for religious freedom, the legal status and rights of churches and other religious communities, the rights of church members, the process of registration with the Government, the rights of registered churches and religious communities, and the responsibilities of the Government's Office for Religious Communities. At the request of the National Council, the Religious Freedoms Act is currently under review by the Constitutional Court.

There were no formal requirements for recognition by the Government, and activities of religious communities were unrestricted regardless of whether they register with the Government. Religious communities must register with the Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be legal entities; registration entitles such groups to rebates on value-added taxes. According to the new Religious Freedoms Act, religious communities must have at least 100 members and must have operated in the country for at least 10 years to register. To register, religious communities must submit a basic application to the Office for Religious Communities detailing proof these two requirements are met as well as the names of the community's representatives in the country, a description of the foundations of the community's religious beliefs, and the organizational act of the church or community. Religious communities registered under the previous law were automatically registered under the new law. During the reporting period, there were 43 religious communities officially registered, up from 40 in 2005 and 42 in 2006. Two applications were rejected during the reporting period on the basis that the organizations did not meet the qualifications of a religious group. There were no cases pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Registered religious groups, including foreign missionaries, may receive value-added tax rebates on a quarterly basis from the Ministry of Finance. All groups reported equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, it has been Government policy since 1991 to pay the social insurance contribution for clergy and other full-time religious workers that is normally paid by an employer. The new Religious Freedoms Act directs the Government to pay social insurance contributions for 1 religious employee per 1,000 members of a religious community. In 2006 the Government paid approximately $2 million for the insurance contributions of over 1,000 religious workers.

Six Christian holy days—Easter Sunday and Monday, Pentecost, the Assumption, Christmas, and Reformation Day are work-free national holidays. Members of religious communities whose important religious festivities do not coincide with those work-free days have the right to use their regular annual leave on their holy days.

At state-licensed schools, lessons with the goal of educating children in a particular religion are forbidden, as are prayer meetings. Licensed schools may not display religious symbols. Students are permitted to wear religious symbols. At unlicensed private religious schools, religious lessons generally are mandatory. The Gov-

ernment partially finances teacher salaries at religiously affiliated schools. Currently there are four Catholic high schools which receive funding.

The Government also finances small grants for religious organizations. In 2006 the program funded 29 projects totaling approximately $38,000.

Individuals can file informal complaints of human rights violations by the national or local authorities with the Human Rights Ombudsman.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There are no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom to worship. Services were generally held in private homes due to lack of a larger venue. Plans are underway to build a mosque in Ljubljana.

After independence in 1991, Parliament passed legislation calling for denationalization and restitution of, or compensation for, church properties—church buildings and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests—that were nationalized after World War II. By March 31, 2007, the Government had adjudicated 35,241 (92 percent) of the 38,306 denationalization claims.

The Roman Catholic Church had been a major property holder in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II. The total value of all property and compensation claimed by the Roman Catholic Church was $293 million (€233.2 million). Despite the Catholic Church's dominance, restitution of its property remained a politically unpopular issue.

To date, there has been no restitution of Jewish communal and heirless properties that were confiscated or nationalized during and after World War II. In 2006, the Ministry of Justice's Department for Restitution and National Reconciliation awarded a tender for a project to compile an inventory of such property. The tender was awarded to the Institute of Contemporary History and research is ongoing. In October 2006 the Ministry of Justice produced a separate report. A third report, funded by the World Jewish Restitution Organization and researched by two experts affiliated with the Institute for Ethnic Studies, had not been completed. The Ministry of Justice, the World Jewish Restitution Organization, and the Jewish Community of Slovenia had plans to discuss this issue.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community is very small. Of an estimated 300 Jews, about half are enrolled members of the Jewish community. Reportedly, negative statements about Jews were common in private conversations, and citizens generally did not consider Jews to be a native population. Jewish community representatives reported some prejudice, ignorance, false stereotypes, and negative images of Jews within society.

There were no reports of anti-Semitic violence or major discrimination.

The Government promoted tolerance and anti-bias education through its programs in primary and secondary schools and made the Holocaust a mandatory topic in the contemporary history curriculum.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government's Office for Religious Communities continued to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue through regular consultations with representatives of all religious communities and a variety of programs. Most notably, this included a small grants program that funded 29 projects totaling approximately USD 38,000 in 2006 and regular interfaith meetings to discuss issues of interest to the interfaith community.

On September 3, 2006, the country celebrated the European Day of Jewish Culture with programs and events organized by the Jewish community with the support of local government officials.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were minor reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Societal attitudes toward religion were complex. Historical events dating from long before the country's independence colored perceptions regarding the dominant Catholic Church. Much of the gulf between the (at least nominally) Catholic center-

right and the largely agnostic or atheistic center-left stemmed from the killing of large numbers of alleged Nazi and Fascist collaborators in the years 1946–48. Many of the accused collaborators were successful businessmen whose assets were confiscated after they were killed or driven from the country, and many were also prominent Catholics. After independence, right-of-center political groups demanded a purge of Communist government and business officials, but this call was quickly replaced by calls for reconciliation.

Interfaith relations were generally amicable in the period covered by this report, although there was little warmth between the Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups that were viewed as aggressive proselytizers. Societal attitudes toward the minority Jewish, Muslim, and Serb Orthodox communities generally were tolerant; however, some persons feared the possible emergence of Muslim fundamentalism. While there were no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom to worship, services were commonly held in private homes or rental spaces under cramped conditions because of the lack of mosques.

The Muslim community had long been planning to build a mosque in Ljubljana. The absence of a mosque was due, in part, to a lack of organization in the community and to complex legislation and bureaucracy reflected in construction and land regulations impacting all new building projects. In June 2007 city officials and representatives of the Muslim Community in Slovenia signed a letter of intent for the sale of municipal land for the construction of a mosque and Islamic cultural center. The sale was expected to take place in September. The site, on city-owned land close to the center, was approved by city and Muslim community officials. Previously, another city-owned site had been identified for the mosque, but it turned out that the Catholic Church already had a denationalization claim pending for that land, and in September 2006 the city council determined that it did not have sufficient financial resources to settle the Church's claim. Since settlement of all claims was a prerequisite for clear title to the land, the search for a mosque site continued. The Muslim community welcomed the new proposed site as its location is preferable to the previous one. Several city councilors received death threats before the meeting when they publicly supported the project to build a mosque in Ljubljana. In 2004 citizens organized a referendum campaign to prevent the Muslim community from building the mosque, but the Constitutional Court struck down the plans to hold the referendum before it could be held.

SECTION IV. U.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 held extensive discussions with the Government on the topic of property denationalization and restitution of heirless and communal Jewish properties confiscated or nationalized after World War II. In addition, the Embassy made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project. The Embassy met with members of all major religious communities and concerned Government officials.

SPAIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination against Jews and Muslims based on religious belief or practice.

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 also engaged with the Government and religious leaders on the challenges of integrating a growing Muslim population.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 194,897 square miles and a population of 44,709,000.

The law prohibits the collection of census data based on religious belief, which limits the ability to compile statistical data on the number of adherents in the country. The Center for Sociological Investigation (CIS), an independent government

agency, collects statistics on religious trends in the society. In February 2007 a CIS survey reported that 79.1 percent of respondents consider themselves Roman Catholic; however, 54.7 percent of those persons state that they almost never attend Mass. In addition, 11.7 percent of Spaniards consider themselves agnostics, 5.7 percent atheists, and 1.7 percent followers of other religions. There also is evidence that the Catholic demographic of believers is aging; an April 2006 survey by the Santa Maria Foundation indicated that for the first time fewer than half of people between the ages of 15 and 24 described themselves as practicing or nonpracticing Catholics.

The Episcopal Conference of Spain (CEE) estimated on May 10, 2007, that there are 35 million Catholics in the country. The Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) estimates that there are 1.2 million evangelical Christians and other Protestants in the country, 800,000 of whom are immigrants or live in the country at least 6 months of the year. A 2006 annual report by Observatorio Andalusi, an institute associated with the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain (UCIDE), estimated that there are 1,080,000 Muslims in the country. The Federation of Jewish Communities estimated that there are 48,000 Jews in the country.

The majority of Muslims are recent immigrants from Morocco, but there are also Algerians, Pakistanis, and immigrants from other Arab or Islamic countries, as well as a number of Spanish converts to Islam. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) Office of Religious Affairs noted that, although the majority of Muslims emigrated from Islamic countries, there was also a small number of Christians that emigrated from countries such as Egypt and Lebanon. At the end of 2005 the Deputy Minister for Immigration reported that immigrants from Morocco were the largest immigrant group in the country. According to the Government, as of March 31, 2007, there were 575,460 Moroccans living in the country legally and as many as 120,000 illegal Moroccan immigrants.

The country also received a large influx of immigrants from Latin America, many of them Catholics. Most Orthodox Christians were from Eastern European countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, and the Ukraine. Evangelical Protestant immigrants typically came from African and Latin American countries, according to Government officials.

The country's largest cities, Madrid and Barcelona, contained the largest number of religious confessions, according to Government officials. According to a 2006 report by Observatorio Andalusi, the largest communities of immigrants from predominantly Islamic countries were located in the autonomous communities of Catalonia, Madrid, and Andalucia, and the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The most recent Government census, taken in 2002, indicated that the population of Orthodox Christian communities was largest in Aragon and Valencia.

On June 30, 2007, the MOJ's Register of Religious Entities listed 12,418 entities created by the Catholic Church. There are 1,851 non-Catholic churches, denominations, and communities in the register, including 1,325 Protestant or evangelical church entities. In addition, there are also 13 Orthodox entities, 2 Jehovah's Witnesses entities, 1 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 1 Unification Church, 10 entities of other Christian confessions, 18 entities of Judaism, 443 entities of Islam, 11 entities of the Baha'i Faith, 4 entities of Hinduism, 28 entities of Buddhism, and 3 entities of other confessions. The Church of Scientology is present in the country, although the MOJ declined to register it as a religious organization.

The number of non-Catholic churches and religious communities in the country may be much larger. Some religious groups choose to register as cultural organizations with regional governments rather than with the National Registry of Religious Entities in Madrid because the national registration process requires more paperwork and can take up to 6 months.

The country hosted a number of foreign missionary groups.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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 the Catholic Church with certain public financing benefits that are not available to other religious entities. These benefits derive from four accords signed with the Holy See in 1979 and cover economic, religious education, military, and judicial matters. The Catholic Church receives financing through voluntary tax contributions and direct payments; how-

ever, direct payments are scheduled to end as of January 1, 2008, according to the Government. Taxpayers may select a box on their income tax forms to contribute up to 0.5 percent of their taxes to the Catholic Church. The maximum percentage was expected to increase to 0.7 percent on January 1, 2008, as an offset to the cessation of direct payments, according to the Government. In 2005 taxpayers contributed approximately $170 million (€125 million) to the Catholic Church. In addition to voluntary taxpayer contributions, the Government provided the Catholic Church an additional $20.4 million (€15 million) via direct payments. 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. These agreements provide certain tax benefits and give civil validity to weddings performed by the religious groups. They also permit the religious groups to place their teachers in schools and chaplains of their faiths in hospitals and prisons. Protestant entities signed the accord as the 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 Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI) and the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain (UCIDE). In 2003 the Government expanded this concept of "well-known deeply-rooted" beliefs (notorio arraigo) to allow other religious groups to sign bilateral agreements. The MOJ granted notorio arraigo to the Mormons in 2003; however, the Church has not negotiated a bilateral agreement with the Government. Jehovah's Witnesses received notorio arraigo status on January 16, 2007. On May 8, 2007, the MOJ stated that rather than coming to separate agreements with each minority religious group, the Government intended to change the law on religion to give the same privileges to all groups that had acquired the status of "well-known deeply rooted beliefs."

In a study published on February 12, 2007, the Spanish Evangelical Alliance (AEE) complained that Evangelicals are discriminated against by the Government. AEE said that the country did not have a problem with lack of freedom of religion, but it did have a problem of equality among religions, starting with its special relationship with the Catholic Church. AEE recommended eliminating the tax designation option and suggested that religious faiths should finance their own expenses.

Beginning in 2005 a new Government-funded Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence, based in the MOJ, began providing funds directly to minority religion confessions to promote religious equality and dialogue among religious groups. The funds, $6.2 million (€4.5 million) in 2007, are used for cultural, educational, and social integration programs (not religious activities). The foundation's board includes representatives of most Government ministries as well as members of the religious groups themselves.

Some autonomous regions have also signed agreements with religious groups in order to encourage social integration. For example, the Catalonian Government has signed agreements with the Islamic Council of Catalonia and Protestant, Jewish, and Baha'i religious communities. These agreements were social rather than financial in nature and were intended to encourage social integration.

National religious holidays include Epiphany (January 6), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Assumption (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas (December 25). Many regional governments also establish local religious holidays. National religious holidays do not have an evident negative effect on other religious groups. In the 1992 cooperation accords with the FCIE and CIE, the Government agreed to recognize Jewish and Muslim holidays and to allow Friday afternoon off from work, with pay, to prepare for the Sabbath. The 1992 accord with FEREDE also accommodates Protestant entities, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, that celebrate Saturday as the Sabbath by giving them Friday afternoon off from work, with pay, to prepare for the Sabbath.

The Law of Religious Freedom of 1980 implements the constitutional provision for freedom of religion. The 1980 law establishes a legal framework 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 MOJ Office of Religious Affairs and updated regularly. To register with the MOJ, 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. Religious groups not officially recognized by the Government have in certain cases been treated as cultural associations.

The first section of the Register of Religious Entities is called the "special section." Catholic entities and those non-Catholic churches, denominations, and communities that have an agreement in cooperation with the state, register themselves in the special section (Jews, Muslims, and Protestants). Catholic dioceses and parishes are not required to register to gain benefits under the 1980 law, as the Episcopal Conference manages the relationship with the Government on behalf of the entire Catholic community.

On May 31, 2007, FEREDE reported that the Government had agreed to study a plan to allow taxpayers to direct 0.7 percent of their income tax to the Protestant community in 2008. Also on May 31, 2007, the Islamic Commission announced its intent to seek a similar arrangement. Negotiations between the Government and Protestant religious leaders began in December 2006 and were ongoing. Many minority religious groups, including Protestant and Islamic groups, requested the Government revise the national income tax form to allow taxpayers the option of donating a percentage of their taxes to non-Catholic entities. These changes began in 2004 when leaders of the Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish communities discussed the issue of expanded tax benefits and public funding, the opening of new places of worship, and the quality of religious education with the Office of Religious Affairs in the MOJ; in particular, they sought treatment comparable to that enjoyed by the Catholic Church.

In general the Government placed no legal restrictions on opening new places of worship; however, representatives of minority religious groups sometimes had difficulty opening places of worship, most frequently because of resistance from neighborhood groups. According to the MOJ Office of Religious Affairs, local governments are obligated to provide land for the opening of places of worship; however, this law was largely ignored by local municipalities. The Ministry carried out a campaign to educate local governments about their responsibilities to minority religious groups. The Catalan regional government's director of religious affairs announced that a law was being drafted that would set guidelines for building mosques.

The law provides for optional Catholic education in public schools. Muslim and Protestant leaders also have called for the Government to provide more support for public religious education in their respective faiths, in accordance with the agreements signed with the Government in 1992. In 2004 the Government responded to these calls by approving legislation that mandated funding for teachers for courses in Catholic, Islamic, Evangelical/Christian, and Judaic studies in public schools when at least 10 students request them. The courses are not mandatory. Those students who elect not to take confessional courses are obliged to take an alternative course covering general social, cultural, and religious themes. The development of curriculums and the financing of teachers for religious education however, is the responsibility of the autonomous communities, with the exception of Andalucía, Aragon, the Basque Country, Las Canarias, Cantabria, and La Rioja, and the two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, where religious education is the responsibility of the national Government.

The selection of religion teachers is made by the entity registered with the MOJ to represent each religious community. Either the national Ministry of Education or the autonomous region entity responsible for education certifies the teachers' credentials. Teachers must hold degrees from a Spanish university, have training in Spanish law, and be fluent in Spanish. For the Muslim community, the Islamic Commission selects religion teachers. UCIDE has the prominent role.

For the 2006–07 academic year, the Government employed 33 teachers to teach courses on Islam to public school students. At the end of the school year in June 2007, the teachers were providing Islamic instruction in schools in Ceuta (11) Melilla (10), Andalucia (10), and Aragon (2). By comparison, the Government funded approximately 15,000 teachers of Catholicism in public schools. The Islamic Commission estimated that there were 74,000 Muslim students who would take classes in Islamic education if possible. Observatorio Andalusi estimated 120,000 Muslim school-age children and called for the hiring of 285 teachers to provide religious instruction for these students.

In Catalonia, although the regional government has declared that it is willing to teach other religions such as Islam in schools, no classes had begun by the end of the reporting period. The Government wanted Muslim leaders to locate professors to give the classes. Approximately 1,250 families requested Muslim religious classes in Catalonia during the 2005–06 school year.

In 2006 the national Government financed the creation and printing of the first Spanish textbook on Islam to be used by first-grade students. The Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence financed the project developed by UCIDE. Editions for higher primary levels were planned. Although available for use by all school districts (as well as the general public through bookstores), its use can only be man-

dated in the regions where the national Government has jurisdiction over religious education.

There are religious schools for Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish students. There are no restrictions placed on parents who want to provide their children religious home school training or enroll them in private religious schools.

The Government has taken steps to promote interfaith understanding through the support or sponsorship of programs on interfaith dialogue, principally through the establishment of the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence. Members of all religious groups serve as members of a Government Committee of Advisors on Religious Freedom. The foundation also sponsors university courses and seminars with representatives of different religious confessions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion, but there were isolated instances of local and regional government policies that had the effect of restricting some individual religious groups. The Islamic and Protestant federations continued to report that the building permit process for new mosque and church construction could be difficult and lengthy, especially for building sites in central urban locations. The Islamic Commission reported that sometimes new mosque construction was forced into less visible suburban areas, primarily because of resistance from neighborhood groups.

On December 10, 2006, the Cultural Islamic Council of Catalonia released a statement signed by more than 50 Muslim leaders demanding mosques suitable for traditional worship in Barcelona as well as a large central mosque. In the Catalonian city of Badalona, the city council asked the Muslim community to attend Friday prayers at a different public gymnasium every week. The community resisted this and asserted its right to public land for a place of worship; according to Observatorio Andalusi, the Catalonian government cited paperwork errors in freezing the approval process.

The situation for religiously observant prisoners continued with mixed results as well. In its 2007 budget, the Government allocated $1,117,000 (€829,000) to finance religious assistance for Jewish, Muslim, and Protestant inmates. Muslim leaders reported that prison officials generally provide access for prayer assistants to visit Muslim prisoners, and on June 9, 2006, the Council of Ministers authorized Evangelical, Jewish, and Islamic religious services for prisoners inside jails. The various religious groups were to appoint worship ministers who would then be authorized by the Penitentiary Administration to conduct religious services in the jails. The 2006 Observatorio Andalusi annual report stated that at the end of 2006, there were no authorized religious assistants for Islamic prisoners. The Islamic Commission reported that the Government was moving forward with its commitment to fund religious assistance, but that there had been no official announcement by the end of the reporting period. The Protestant federation was working with the Government and with individual prison wardens to arrive at a suitable arrangement for religious services inside prisons, but that work was not concluded by the end of the reporting period. However, Protestant chaplains had some access to prisoners.

The Government does not recognize all religious groups with international membership. The Unification Church and the Church of Scientology have gone to court to seek legal status as religions (see Legal/Policy Framework). Although the Unification Church won its court case in 2001, the Church of Scientology failed to gain legal status as a religion and functioned with the status of a community organization.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Jewish community leaders reported that while violence against persons in the Jewish community was rare, they were concerned about anti-Semitism expressed as vandalism against Jewish institutions. On July 25, 2006, the building housing the Jewish Information Center in Toledo was defaced with 12 swastikas. Synagogues in Barcelona were vandalized at various times during the year, especially during the July–August conflict involving Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Also, in 2005 Jewish synagogues in Barcelona were defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti. No suspects were arrested.

Jewish community leaders also cited some incidents of anti-Semitic propaganda in the media and in local government institutions. Jacobo Israel Garzon, president

of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Spain, stated in a November 5, 2006, article in the *International Herald Tribune* that, despite increased interest in the country's Jewish heritage, "a new anti-Semitism is developing in Spain. It uses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as its source, but it passes very quickly from anti-Israelism to anti-Semitism." On July 17, 2006, the Spanish newspaper *La Razón* published an article called "Judiadas," which means "bad acts worthy of Jews," by Jorge Berlanga. The article contained a broad attack on the Jews and said, among other things, that the Jews have "a blood oath which impedes any form of generosity with other races."

The European Jewish Congress, in a report on alleged anti-Semitism during the July–August 2006 conflict involving Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, cited an article that appeared in *El Mundo* linking Nazi Germany and Israel, accusing Israel of using the same arguments made by the Nazi leaders to justify its "aggression." The article continued, "Now the victims of this period (the 1930s) have become the executioners."

On November 26, 2006, at a soccer game between Deportivo La Coruna and Osasuna, Osasuna fans shouted anti-Semitic slurs at Dudu Aouate, a Deportivo player from Israel.

The 2006 annual country report on anti-Semitism by the Stephen Roth Institute, released in May 2007, said that "The majority of the media and public opinion blamed Israel for the summer confrontations in Lebanon and Gaza, sometimes lacing their attacks with anti-Semitic overtones." The report also noted that the King, the President, and members of his Cabinet attended the nation's main Holocaust commemoration January 26, 2007, at the Complutense University of Madrid.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

Muslim and Protestant leaders cited the work of the Government's Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence as a clear step in the right direction for incorporating non-Catholic faiths. The Government itself attributed the Foundation with significant increases in the number of religious organizations officially registered with the MOJ (registration is mandatory in order to apply for Foundation funds).

The Islamic Commission also reported that female Muslim students who wore headscarves did not encounter problems with the uniform codes that private schools are allowed to implement. The Government consistently held that the right to education takes priority over the enforcement of clothing regulations.

On April 15, 2007, leaders of the Jewish community in Madrid and the city of Madrid established the country's first Holocaust memorial.

The Government financed the creation and printing of the first official Spanish textbook on Islam to be used by primary education students, which was first used during the 2006–07 academic year. The Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence financed and managed the project in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Islamic Commission.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The growth of the country's immigrant population at times led to social friction, which in isolated instances had a religious component. Some citizens blamed recent Moroccan immigrants for increased crime rates in the country.

Several books and newspaper articles discussed complex attitudes that society held about Spanish converts to Islam. The articles mentioned the traditional role of converts as the moderate face of Islam and liaison with mainstream Spanish culture; however, the articles alleged that some community and government leaders in the country saw converts as potential targets for extremist recruitment.

In Catalonia on January 29, 2007, a far-right politician introduced a measure before the city council of Vic calling for the prohibition of the full face-covering veil or niqab in public. The measure was defeated and drew criticism from other council members in Vic and from the media. On November 29, 2006, the BBC reported that a prominent member of the Jewish community argued that religious symbols in public were not necessary, preferring to restrict such expression of religious feeling to private life. Some prominent Roman Catholics on the other hand responded that religious freedom should permit all to wear religious symbols, including the veil or the niqab in public, as long as those symbols were freely chosen and not a sign of submission to men.

On December 27, 2006, the Islamic Junta of Spain appealed to Pope Benedict XVI to allow Muslim worshippers to pray at the Cordoba Mezquita, a site of religious significance to both Catholics and Muslims, having been built as a mosque during the Muslim era and turned into a cathedral after Christian monarchs captured Cordoba in 1236. The Islamic Junta asked the Vatican to convert the mezquita into an

ecumenical center where members of all faiths could worship. On December 28, the Archbishop of Cordoba declined this request.

On December 19, 2006, the European Observatory for Racism released a report describing the results of a June survey by the Pew Global Attitudes Project which found that only 29 percent of respondents in the country held a good opinion of Muslims; in response to a separate question, 83 percent of respondents associated "Muslim" with "fanaticism." In the opinion of 58 percent of the respondents, being a devout Muslim was incompatible with modern society, and 41 percent believed that at least some of the country's Muslims supported Islamic extremism. In the view of more than 80 percent of respondents, Islam did not respect women.

On November 24, 2006, a Muslim woman was badly beaten by four other women in Santa Cruz de Tenerifa, Canary Islands, for wearing a hijab. The victim, a Spanish convert to Islam, reported that the assault took place in front of witnesses in the neighborhood, none of whom came forward. The assailants called the woman a "Moor" based on her Islamic dress.

On November 19, 2006, unknown persons vandalized the Colon Park mosque in Cordoba, defacing it with graffiti of swastikas and other xenophobic symbols.

According to a November 23, 2006, report on the Muslim community produced by the polling organization Metroscopia for the Ministry of Interior, 31 percent of Muslim respondents said they were completely adapted to Spanish life and customs, 49 percent were fairly well adapted, and 19 percent said they were not well adapted. Among respondents, 83 percent said they had not encountered any obstacles to the practice of their religion, while 13 percent said they had. Among the respondents, 57 percent believed Spanish society was tolerant of the Muslim religion, while 37 percent thought there was some prejudice.

Spanish and other newspapers reported stories which indicated that many in society understood the need for religious tolerance. On October 3, 2006, some villages in Valencia that traditionally celebrated the expulsion of the Moors with festivals where Muhammad was knocked off his horse toned down either the extent of the celebration or the actual defilement of the Prophet in deference to the feelings of the local Muslim citizens.

Muslim communities complained of the lack of Islamic cemeteries in Spain. The MOJ is working to increase cooperation between local governments and Islamic communities to resolve 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. Embassy officials also meet with religious leaders of various denominations.

The Embassy facilitated exchanges between U.S. and local religious associations to foster dialogue and promote religious tolerance and freedom. The Embassy in Madrid and the Consulate in Barcelona organized a Muslim engagement working group and developed a Mission strategy to coordinate and promote increased contact with the Islamic community to more effectively evaluate and understand the unique challenges and obstacles faced by this population. Through informal advocacy and formal representation with foreign diplomats, Government representatives and Muslim community leaders, the Embassy sought to sustain and inform the ongoing debate in Spain on religious freedom. During the period covered by this report, the Mission reached out to leaders of the CIE and the largest mosque. Embassy officers maintained relationships with numerous immigrant and religious groups. The Embassy brought a Muslim-American to speak on religious tolerance and the importance in a democracy for the respect of diversity. The Ambassador established close links with his counterparts from the Muslim world and met repeatedly with leaders of the Muslim and Jewish communities.

SWEDEN

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

There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 173,732 square miles and a population of 9.1 million. Approximately 77 percent of the population belongs to the Church of Sweden. More of people have left the Church of Sweden each year since it separated from the state in 2000. During 2006, 59,302 persons left the church, 0.9 percent of the members. Church of Sweden studies found that individuals left primarily for economic reasons; membership carries a tax of 1.19 percent of members' incomes. In 2005 the Church of Sweden baptized 67.7 percent of all children, a figure that has steadily declined over the past two decades. Confirmations declined more sharply; according to the latest available figures, less than 36.5 percent of 15-year-olds were confirmed in 2005, as opposed to 80 percent in 1970.

There are an estimated 140,000 Roman Catholics, of whom 83,528 are registered with the Roman Catholic Church. Approximately 85 percent of Catholics are first- or second-generation immigrants, with the largest groups coming from southern Europe, Latin America, and Poland. Within the Stockholm Catholic Diocese, the Armenian, Chaldean, Maronite, Melchite, and Syrian churches celebrate Mass in their respective languages, as do the Polish, Croatian, Spanish, Italian, Eritrean, Vietnamese, Korean, and Ukrainian communities.

The Orthodox Christian Church has approximately 107,000 practicing members. The main national Orthodox churches are Syrian, Serbian, Greek, Romanian, and Macedonian.

There is a large Finnish-speaking Lutheran denomination.

While weekly services in Christian churches generally are poorly attended, many persons observe major church festivals and prefer religious ceremonies to mark turning points in life such as weddings and funerals.

More than 400,000 persons attend Protestant churches other than the Church of Sweden. The Pentecostal movement and the Missionary (or Missions) Church are the largest Protestant groups outside of the Church of Sweden. In 2005, according to the latest available figures, the Pentecostal movement had 86,669 registered members, down from a peak of more than 100,000 in 1985. The Missionary Church had 62,565 registered members in 2004, the latest year for which statistics were available. Evangelical churches have an estimated membership of 31,000, a figure that reportedly is slowly increasing in number.

Jehovah's Witnesses count approximately 22,500 members. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has an estimated 9,000 members.

The number of Jews is estimated to be 18,500 to 20,000. The Jewish community estimates 9,500 are practicing members. There are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewish synagogues, found mostly in the cities. Large numbers of Jews attend High Holy Day services, but attendance at weekly services is low.

The major religious communities and the Church of Sweden are spread across the country. Large numbers of immigrants in recent decades have introduced various religious faiths, including Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and a number of Christian denominations. These communities are concentrated in the larger cities.

Buddhists number approximately 15,000, Hindus 7,000 to 10,000, Sikhs slightly more than 1,000, and Zoroastrians 500.

Reliable statistics on the number of atheists are not available; however, estimates placed the figure at 10 to 20 percent of the adult population. Other estimates range upwards from 46 percent.

The Muslim population grew substantially over the past 60 years. It increased from a few individuals prior to 1950, to approximately 100,000 by the end of the 1980s, and 400,000 to 450,000 today. According to the Muslim community, an estimated 100,000 Muslims are religiously active. There are mosques in many parts of the country.

Several smaller, internationally active religious groups are also established in the country. Such groups include the Church of Scientology (approximately 3,000 members), Hare Krishna, Word of Faith, and the Unification Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 the protection of religious freedom. The laws concerning religious freedoms are generally observed and enforced at all government levels and by the courts in a nondiscriminatory fashion. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private actors.

Hate-speech laws seek to prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for people based on several factors, including religious belief.

Since the separation of church and state in 2000, eight recognized religious denominations, in addition to the Church of Sweden, raise revenues through member contributions made through the national tax system. These include the Swedish Missionary Church, Roman Catholic Church, Swedish Alliance Mission, Baptist Union of Sweden, Salvation Army, Methodist Church in Sweden, Pentecostal Church, and the Evangelist Church. All recognized denominations are entitled to direct Government financial support, contributions made through the national tax system, or a mix of both. The state does not favor the Church of Sweden over other religious groups.

Certain Christian holy days are national holidays. Students from minority religious backgrounds may observe their religious holidays.

No recognition or registration is required to carry out religious activity. Religious groups that want to receive Government aid may apply for it. In reviewing such applications, the Government considers the number of members in the group and its length of establishment, but applies no other criteria. The Government promotes interfaith understanding and meets annually with representatives from various religious groups. The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities is a Government body under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. Twenty-two registered religious groups (39 including sub-groups) are entitled to Government aid.

Religious education covering all major world religions is compulsory in public schools. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools, all of which receive Government subsidies provided they adhere to Government guidelines on core academic curriculum.

The Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination (DO) is an independent government authority. The objective of the DO is to ensure that discrimination relating to ethnic origin, religion, or other belief does not occur. To that end, it has three principal duties: To educate against discrimination; to assist individuals exposed to discrimination; and to supervise employers, institutes of higher education, and other schools to ensure that they fulfill relevant requirements of the law and combat discrimination through targeted and proactive measures.

The Living History Forum—a Government authority established in 2003 to promote tolerance, democracy, and human rights using the Holocaust as a starting point—promotes national educational programs on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and racism. In 2006 the forum initiated an educational exhibition project, "Sweden and the Holocaust," that toured nationwide. The forum also conducted an educational campaign entitled "Anne Frank & I," which targeted high school students.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The law requires animal slaughter to be preceded by stunning and/or the administration of anesthetics to minimize suffering by the animal. Some members of the Jewish community have protested that this prevents kosher slaughter in the country, requiring kosher meat to be imported. The Muslim community appeared to be split between those who believed certain anesthetic methods do not conflict with halal requirements and those who believed that they do. In April 2006 the Animal Protection Authority issued a Government-commissioned report on animal slaughter and recommended the current law be maintained.

The law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, in the case of boys under the age of 2 months, in the presence of a person certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW). The NBHW has certified mohels (persons ordained to carry out circumcision according to the Jewish faith) to perform the operations but requires that a medical doctor or an anesthesiologist 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.

In 2006 the NBHW evaluated male circumcision in the country. The NBHW reported that each year approximately 3,000 circumcisions are performed; only an estimated one-third are performed legally.

Individuals serving in the military are given the opportunity to fulfill religious requirements. The military offers food options complying with religious dietary re-

quirements and allows time off 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. Armed forces guidelines allow the wearing of religious headwear.

In February 2007 the city of Stockholm denied a Muslim woman employment as a nurse at a home for the elderly because she wore a head scarf. The woman filed a complaint with the DO. In an out-of-court settlement, the city paid the woman approximately $4,000 (28,000 Swedish kronas) in compensation.

In May 2006 the National School Authority ruled that a public school in the city of Umea had acted improperly in expelling a Muslim student for wearing a head scarf. The ruling enables Muslim students to wear head scarves in school.

In March 2006 the National Police Board incorporated in its diversity guidelines the right of police officers to wear religious headwear.

In June 2005 the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* reported that the DO was suing the city of Gothenburg for two instances in which Muslim women were turned away at a swimming pool because they were wearing arm-length tops. Pool employees maintained the clothing violated pool regulations. One of the women believed that she was turned away because she was wearing a veil. The ombudsman subsequently filed a lawsuit against the city of Gothenburg. The district court ruled that the responsible person at the pool had not violated discrimination laws but had upheld security regulations.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Since 2000 approximately 130 anti-Semitic crimes have been reported annually. In 2004 the number rose to 151. However, the increase was attributed largely to a change in statistical methodology. In 2005 the number of reported cases decreased to 111, and in 2006 there were 134 reported cases.

The most frequent anti-Semitic crime was "agitation against an ethnic group," with 48 reported incidents in 2006. The second most frequent type of incident was "unlawful threat or molestation," with 35 reported cases that year. Nazi symbols, such as Hitler salutes and the use of swastikas, were associated with 32 percent of reported anti-Semitic crimes.

The openly Nazi organization National Socialist Front Party (NSF) participated in the September 2006 elections on both regional and national levels. The party gained 1,417 votes nationally, representing about 0.03 percent of the electorate. In 2006 media reported that individuals associated with the NSF committed discriminatory acts. These included one case of serious assault, incidents of hate speech, unauthorized demonstrations, illegal distribution of posters, illegal possession of weapons, and disorderly conduct.

The Jewish Congregation of Stockholm reported that approximately 50 Jews and individuals with Jewish-sounding last names had received letters with anti-Semitic content during the September–October 2006 period; they were thought to be related to the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict in Lebanon. During the period, Jewish congregations noticed an increase in the number of attacks and threat messages with anti-Semitic content. According to the nongovernmental organization EXPO, anti-Semitic content increased on neo-Nazi Web sites during this time.

In November 2005 Swedish Radio revealed that the bookshop in the Stockholm Central Mosque was selling audio cassettes with anti-Semitic content. One tape included calls for Muslims to kill Jews. Police subsequently seized a number of tapes and compact disks from the mosque. The material contained highly anti-Semitic content, including calls for a holy war against Jews in which suicide bombers are celebrated as martyrs. In January 2006 the Chancellor of Justice, a civil servant who serves as a Government legal advisor, issued an opinion that the contents of the tapes and compact disks did not constitute hate speech under the law. The hate-speech law provides as follows: "A person who, in a disseminated statement or communication, threatens or expresses contempt for a national, ethnic, or other group of persons with allusion to race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation shall be sentenced for agitation against such a group to imprisonment for at most 2 years or, if the crime is petty, to a fine." The Chancellor of Justice claimed that, in light of the broader Middle East conflict, such language could be interpreted as applying to the broader conflict and not to groups within the country per se, and hence did not violate the law.

The Jewish Congregation of Stockholm reported the desecration of approximately 10 gravestones in the Jewish cemetery in Stockholm in August 2005. Police investigated but later dropped the case due to lack of evidence.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Citizens were generally tolerant of diverse religious practices. However, anti-Semitism existed, and Muslims were subject to societal discrimination. Law enforcement authorities maintained statistics on hate crimes but did not break the figures down by religious group, with the exception of anti-Semitic incidents. Anti-Muslim incidents appeared to have increased over the past few years. There also was a significant incidence of strong anti-Semitic views among resident Muslims.

In May 2007 a supermarket in Frolunda (western region) denied employment to a Muslim woman because she wore a head scarf. The woman filed a complaint with the DO. In an out-of-court settlement, the supermarket paid the woman approximately $11,000 (76,000 Swedish krona) in compensation. It now allows employees to wear head scarves.

In April 2007 the Scandic Hotel chain (the largest hotel operator in the Nordic region) removed all Bibles from its hotel rooms after a guest complained that the presence of a Bible constituted religious discrimination. A media debate ensued, leading Scandic to reintroduce the Bible together with the Qur'an and the Tanach in all hotel rooms.

In June 2006 a court convicted three high school students of violation of the country's hate-speech law for giving Nazi salutes in front of teachers and fellow students. The court sentenced two of those convicted to pay fines and the third to receive social counseling.

In May 2006 two masked individuals stabbed a Sunni Muslim imam in the chest in the city of Gavle. Authorities opened an investigation but made no arrests, and in June 2007 police closed the case due to lack of evidence.

In February 2006 an amusement park in Gothenburg denied employment to a Muslim woman on grounds that the wearing of a head scarf violated the employee dress code. She filed a complaint with the DO. In an out-of-court settlement, the park paid the woman $1,500 (10,000 Swedish kronas) and offered her employment. The park's employee dress code now allows employees to wear head scarves.

In April 2006 an appeals court in Gothenburg acquitted Lief Liljestrom of hate-speech and Web site content charges for which he was sentenced in April 2005; however, the court found him guilty of being an accomplice to hate speech for allowing third parties to post offensive material on his Web site. Liljestrom had posted material judged to be offensive toward homosexuals. Liljestrom appealed the lower court conviction, arguing that the online content reflected his Christian convictions. The appeals court sentenced Liljestrom to 1 month's imprisonment. He subsequently appealed to the Supreme Court, which in December 2006 agreed to hear his case. A hearing date had not been set by the end of the reporting period.

In September and October 2005 unidentified individuals carried out arson attacks at the Islamic Center in Malmo.

In November 2005 Swedish Radio (SR) reported that 4 of 10 Islamic organizations in the country believed they had been threatened, according to an investigation by an SR news program which interviewed 100 organizations. The report stated that 3 of 10 organizations had had property vandalized. Abuses ranged from graffiti to attacks with fire bombs.

In October 2004 the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention and the Living History Forum together presented a report on intolerance toward Muslims and Jews among high school students. In March 2006 both organizations released their follow-up report on anti-Semitism in the country. Five percent of individuals questioned for the report, and 39 percent of those questioned who identified themselves as Muslims, professed strong anti-Semitic views; 36 percent of all respondents indicated an ambivalent view toward Jewish people.

In November 2006 the two organizations issued an additional follow-up report on Islamophobia. The report observed an increased societal awareness of Islam and Muslims in the country. It found that public discussions on Islam were frequent and often involved questions such as female genital mutilation, male circumcision, ritual animal slaughter, religious private schools, the wearing of religious garments in public places, Shari'a, so-called "honor" violence, and Government permission for the construction of mosques. The report stated that one-third of respondents exhibited a bias against 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. Government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The U.S. Embassy maintained regular contact with local religious leaders, and Embassy officials participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance.

SWITZERLAND

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

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, particularly against Islamic and Jewish minorities. Plans by some Islamic associations to build minarets alongside their houses of worship met considerable local opposition and have spurred the public debate on the role of Muslims in society.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 15,942 square miles and a population of 7,459,100.

Three quarters of the population nominally belong to either the Roman Catholic or the Protestant churches, but actual church attendance rates are much lower.

The arrival of immigrants has contributed to the noticeable growth of religious communities that had little presence in the country in the past. The 2000 census notes membership in religious denominations was as follows: 41.8 percent Roman Catholic; 35.3 percent Protestant; 4.3 percent Muslim; and 11.1 percent professed no formal creed. Groups that constitute less than 4 percent of the population include: Christian Orthodox, Old Catholic, other Christian groups, Buddhist, Hindu, and Jewish. Authorities had no indication of religious affiliation for 4.3 percent of residents.

The majority of Muslims originate from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania, followed by Turkey as well as Arab and North African countries. Muslim immigrants from the Balkans and Southeastern Europe typically settle in the German-speaking eastern and central regions, whereas those arriving from Arab and North African countries commonly relocate in the French speaking western region. The majority are Sunni Muslims, while other groups include Shi'a, Alawites and others. About 10 to 15 percent of these are estimated to be practicing believers. The country has two large mosques, in Geneva and Zurich, and approximately 120 official prayer rooms. It is believed that another 100 prayer rooms exist, many of them belonging to Albanian, Turkish or Arab communities.

Approximately 75 percent of Jewish households are located in Zurich, Geneva, Basel, and Bern.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 (states) according to Article 72 of the Constitution. Most of the 26 cantons (with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel, where church and state are separate) financially support at least one of the three traditional religious communities—Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, or Protestant—with funds collected through taxation. Each canton observes 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 the church tax may have to formally leave the church. In some cantons, private companies are unable to avoid payment of the church tax. Some cantons grant "church taxation" status, which the traditional three Christian communities enjoy, to the Jewish community. Islamic and other nonofficial religious groups are excluded from these benefits.

On December 19 to 20, 2006, the Vaud cantonal parliament adopted new legislation on church-state relations that makes the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church the two officially recognized denominations receiving public funding. The legislation granted the Jewish community the status of an institution of public interest and also paved the way to grant the same status to other religious denominations, provided these communities are committed to interconfessional tolerance and respect of the Swiss legal order, namely the equality between the sexes. On September 28, 2006, the federal Parliament approved the Basel cantonal Constitution, adopted by voters in 2005. The Basel Constitution grants official recognition to the Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Old Catholic churches as well as the Jewish community and paves the way for granting "nontraditional" religious communities, including Islam, recognition as official religions under cantonal law.

A religious organization must register with the Government in order to receive tax-exempt status.

Groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize. Foreign missionaries must obtain a "religious worker" visa to work in the country. Visa requirements include proof that the foreigner would not displace a citizen from doing the job, has formally completed theological training, and would be supported financially by the host organization. The host organization must acknowledge the country's legal order and must not tolerate its abuse by members, either in theory or in practice. Between November 2005 and October 2006 numerous ordained clergymen and unordained religious employees were working on short-term permits in the country.

Education policy is set at the cantonal level, but school authorities at the county level wield some discretionary power in their implementation. Religious education is taught in most public cantonal schools, with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel. Classes in Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines are normally offered; some schools also cover other religious groups living in the country. In Lucerne Canton, two municipalities have offered religious classes in Islamic doctrine since 2002. In some cantons, religious classes are entirely voluntary, while in others they form part of the curriculum; however, waivers are routinely granted for children whose parents request them. Those of different religious groups are free to attend classes for their own creeds during the class period. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by their church, or they may teach their children at home.

A number of cantons have reformed religious education in public schools to either complement or entirely supplant traditional classes in Christian doctrine with nonconfessional teachings about religion and culture. On March 12, 2007, the Zurich cantonal parliament decided to introduce secularized religious instruction in primary schools. The decision prompted the withdrawal of a citizens' ballot initiative launched against a 2004 decision to discontinue traditional classes in biblical history. At the primary school level, pupils will be taught primarily about Christianity, with other religions being covered to the extent they affect the children's realms of experience. In virtually all cantons contemplating or implementing reform, authorities planned to make the nonconfessional teachings about religion and culture a nonelective part of the curriculum for all pupils.

Regarding waivers on religious grounds from classes other than confessional instruction, there are no national guidelines and practices vary. Some cantons have issued guidelines not to excuse pupils from swimming or physical education classes despite a contrary ruling of the Federal Court Tribunal (Supreme Court) from 1993, holding that such exemptions on religious grounds are constitutional. Education policy is set at the cantonal level, but school authorities at the county level wield some discretionary power in their implementation.

Religious customs, such as genital mutilation of children, forced marriage, or the unilateral repudiation of marriage by the husband, are illegal.

The law prohibits anti-Semitic incitement and historical revisionism, including Holocaust denial.

The Government's Federal Service for the Combating of Racism continued to support anti-racism activities with money from the regular federal budget. For the year 2007, Parliament earmarked $640,000 (800,000 Swiss francs) to fund projects.

On September 24, 2006, voters in a national referendum adopted a new Federal Law on Foreigners, establishing mandatory training for immigrant clerics in order to facilitate their integration into society. Among other provisions, the training pro-

gram would ensure that immigrants can speak at least one of the three main national languages. The law is slated to enter into force at the beginning of 2008.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Some cantons refused to grant residency permits to imams considered "fundamentalists." Between November 2004 and October 2006, federal authorities issued a total of 15 working permits for imams from Turkey, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Resident Islamic organizations complained that authorities in many cantons and municipalities discriminated against them by refusing zoning approval to build mosques or Islamic cemeteries. For example, a project involving an Islamic association in the Canton of Bern, in the northwestern city of Langenthal, met with local resistance when the association first unveiled plans to build a minaret on top of its prayer room. On April 16, 2007, the Bern Cantonal Building, Infrastructure and Energy Department cancelled the building permit that the Langenthal city authorities issued on December 20, 2006, after the Islamic association had formally agreed not to issue calls for prayer from the minaret. According to the department, the building request did not include a plan of operations allowing an assessment of conformity with zoning regulations. City authorities sent the dossier back for reconsideration.

The 2005 Law on the Protection of Animals prevents local ritual slaughter for kosher and halal meat; however, importation of such meat remains legal and available for Orthodox Jewish and Muslim communities at comparable prices.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

A March 28, 2007, survey found that 10 percent of the population harbor negative opinions about Jews, 78 percent of the population think that a civilized society has to stand up against anti-Semitism, and 90 percent want anti-Semitic action to lead to prosecution.

During 2006 the Geneva-based Intercommunity Center for Coordination against anti-Semitism and Defamation (CICAD) recorded 67 anti-Semitic incidents in the western, French-speaking part of the country, ranging from verbal and written assaults to offensive graffiti and acts of vandalism against Jewish property. For the year 2005 CICAD noted 75 anti-Semitic incidents in the same part of the country.

The campaign Children of the Holocaust, a local association against anti-Semitism, racism, and political extremism, recorded 73 anti-Semitic incidents in the German-speaking part of the country for the period between September 2005 and December 2006.

Authorities believed that a May 24, 2007, fire at the Hekhal Hanes synagogue in Geneva was caused by arson, but have not ascribed political extremism as the motive for the attack (See Societal Abuses and Discrimination section).

During the first week of December 2006, vandals tossed stones at the windows of the synagogue in Bern and painted swastikas on the building.

On September 23, 2006, in Lausanne, a group of youth threw a bottle filled with unidentified liquid at two persons of Jewish faith, one of whom was wearing a kippa, and insulted them with anti-Semitic slurs. On July 8, 2006, an Israeli man was attacked while on a train by a person of Arab origin who shouted "Jihad!" and "Screw the Jews!"

The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 prompted demonstrations that included anti-Israeli as well as anti-Semitic sentiments, according to the 2006 Annual Report on Anti-Semitism from the Stephen Roth Institute. On July 21, 2006, people reported at least one Israeli flag festooned with a swastika at a demonstration in Bern protesting Israeli military action in Lebanon against Hezbollah. On July 31, 2006, a similar demonstration took place in Geneva; the Israeli flags with swastikas were again abundant, according to CICAD. On July 4, 2006, unidentified vandals painted swastikas on a synagogue in Zurich. Throughout the summer CICAD tracked an increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric in the letters-to-the-editors pages of some large-circulation Francophone newspapers.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 25, 2007, the Geneva cantonal parliament adopted an amendment of its legislation on cemeteries which provides for the creation of separate sections of bur-

ial sites where the deceased of different religious communities can be buried in accord with the rites and requirements of their religion. Previous legislation did not allow the creation of confessional sections in public cemeteries.

On March 27, 2007, Justice Minister Blocher met with some 20 representatives of various Muslim organizations for an exchange of views on integration and security. Although the justice ministry regularly convenes communities and organizations to discuss matters under its purview, it was the first such meeting with Muslim organizations.

On March 19, 2007, the National Council (lower house of Parliament) rejected a motion to abolish the Federal Commission against Racism (EKR). The motion had been tabled by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) in December 2004.

On January 27, 2007, following the precedent of previous years, schools across the country held a day of remembrance for victims of the Holocaust. In her official address on the occasion President Micheline Calmy-Rey welcomed these educational efforts as particularly important and thanked all those combating racism and persecution.

On September 1, 2006, the EKR released a set of recommendations to counter the observed societal discrimination against the Muslim minority. The Commission noted that Muslims at times face discrimination in various forms in their day-to-day lives, when requesting permits for community buildings or Muslim sections in public cemeteries, applying for citizenship, or in the labor market. In its recommendations, the EKR asked for a more active stance of the authorities against discrimination, a more flexible approach to Muslim community building projects, and religious education in public schools that reflects the religious diversity of today's classes.

The Federal Government joined with national youth associations to support the Council of Europe's youth campaign "All Different-All Equal" to promote diversity, human rights, and political participation. The campaign, which is scheduled to run from June 2006 to September 2007, aims to involve as many youths as possible in local and regional projects.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were isolated reports of societal abuse and discrimination, but whether these instances were based on religious belief and practice or ethnicity and culture is difficult to determine. Some observers remained concerned about the climate for members of religious, particularly Muslim and Jewish, minorities. There were at least two violent anti-Semitic physical assaults and a few serious acts of vandalism against Jewish religious property. (See the Anti-Semitism section above.) However, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

According to statistics gathered by the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, the total number of reported incidents against foreigners or minorities was 93 in 2006, slightly lower than the 103 incidents recorded in 2005. These figures included instances of verbal and written attacks, which were much more frequent than physical assaults.

In the early morning hours of May 24, 2007, a fire broke out at the Hekhal Hanes synagogue in Geneva's Malagnou neighborhood and quickly engulfed most of the building. The entrance hall was charred, and other rooms sustained heavy damage from smoke and water when fire crews extinguished the blaze. No one was hurt in the incident. President Calmy-Rey expressed grave concern at the prospect of an arson attack and pledged her solidarity with the Jewish community of Geneva and the country.

On February 22, 2007, a loose coalition of center-left parties in the Canton of Zurich and the Association of Muslim Organizations in Zurich (VIOZ) issued a joint statement denouncing an advertisement of the right-wing SVP in the run up to the cantonal elections. The Zurich chapter of the SVP in mid-February ran newspaper advertisements that carried the slogan "Islamic population +1560%" and praised the SVP as the only party consistently opposing "the spreading of Islam." The center-left parties and VIOZ said the ad abused vague fears of Islam for political ends and affected the religious freedom of Muslims.

On February 20, 2007, a criminal court found the perpetrator of a 2004 attack on the imam of Lausanne not responsible for his actions by reason of insanity and ordered his confinement in a psychiatric institution. The man had entered the local Islamic Center during Friday prayers and stabbed the cleric and a nearby worshiper with a knife. The two victims were each granted $12,000 (15,000 Swiss francs) indemnity.

A row continued over the plans of a local Turkish cultural association to add a minaret to its house of worship in the northwestern village of Wangen in the Can-

ton of Solothurn. On January 8, 2007, a group of neighbors opposing the minaret filed a complaint with the Federal Court Tribunal (Supreme Court), which remained pending at the end of the reporting period. They went to the high court after a November 23, 2006, ruling by a cantonal administrative court, which threw out their complaint and ruled that the minaret did not violate zoning restrictions. The court also affirmed that no calls for prayer could be made from the minaret. The neighbors filed the original court appeal after the Solothurn Building and Justice Department gave the go ahead on July 13, 2006, for the planned 18-foot high minaret, overturning a contrary decision of the local building commission.

The minaret building projects in Wangen, (in the Solothurn canton) Langenthal, (in the Bern canton) and Wil, (in the Sankt Gallen canton), provoked fierce political debates beyond the communities concerned. On June 21, 2007, Ambassador Omur Orhun, Personal Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairman on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, expressed deep concern about a petition that aims to ban the construction of minarets across the country. On April 10, 2007, a committee comprising members of the federal Parliament from the SVP and the Federal Democratic Union (EDU) launched a popular initiative to ban the construction of minarets across the country. The period in which supporters can gather the 100,000 signatures necessary to bring the popular initiative to a ballot vote lasts until November 2008. Three cabinet ministers were quick to condemn the initiative; President and Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey said it jeopardized the country's interests and the security of its people. Islamic umbrella organizations, in a joint statement deplored the popular initiative as the latest form of anti-Islamic agitation by the political right which threatens peaceful co-existence and hampers the integration of Muslims. On September 4, 2006, the Zurich parliament narrowly decided to hold a debate on a ban of the construction of minarets across the canton. In Solothurn, the cantonal parliament on June 27, 2006, rejected a proposal for an outright ban of the construction of religious buildings that implicitly targeted minarets. (At the end of the reporting period, there were only two minarets in the country, at the Geneva and Zurich mosques.)

On December 2, 2006, the Catholic bishop from Basle-Lugano (Ticino canton) joined the Jewish community for prayers in the local synagogue. It was the first time one of the country's bishops participated in the Sabbath-celebrations of a Jewish community.

On May 14, 2007, the Swiss Council of Religions (SCR) announced that Interior Minister Pascal Couchepin received a SCR delegation for the first of what were billed as biannual meetings to discuss current issues of religious policy. (The SCR is comprised of senior representatives from the Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholics, the Swiss Protestant Church, and the Muslim and Jewish communities.) Earlier, following its second meeting on November 24, 2006, the SCR expressed great concern about the observed use of religion for political ends and condemned efforts categorically to discredit the Anti-Racism Clause of the Penal Code. The SCR held that popular fears were being exploited for partisan gain and that it was out of the question to deny religious communities their constitutional rights, for example with a popular initiative prohibiting minarets.

On August 24, 2006, the SCR convened for its first meeting in Bern. They issued a statement reaffirming the right to wear religious symbols in public.

Some employers prohibited the wearing of headscarves in the workplace. For example, the second largest retailer announced that its dress code did not provide for any headgear, and that it would not allow the wearing of the Islamic headscarf or hijab.

Many nongovernmental organizations coordinated interfaith events to promote tolerance throughout the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

TURKEY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Violent attacks and threats against non-Muslims during the reporting period created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslim communities. Although proselytizing is legal in the country, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is faced a few restrictions and occasional harassment for alleged proselytizing or unauthorized meetings. The Government continued to oppose "Islamic fundamentalism." Authorities continued their broad ban on wearing Muslim religious headscarves in Government offices, universities, and schools (upheld by the European Court of Human Rights); a 2006 court ruling, some argue, has extended this ban to the private sphere.

Religious minorities said they were effectively blocked from careers in state institutions because of their faith. Christians, Baha'is, and some Muslims faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and more radical Islamist elements continued to express anti-Semitic sentiments. Additionally, persons wishing to convert from Islam to another religion sometimes experienced social harassment and violence from relatives and neighbors.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom matters with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Mission representatives met frequently with Government officials and representatives of religious groups during the reporting year to discuss matters related to religious freedom, including legal reform aimed at lifting restrictions on religious minorities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 301,383 square miles and a population of 72.6 million. According to the Government, 99 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of which is Sunni. According to the human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Mazlum-Der and representatives of various religious minority communities, the actual percentage of Muslims is slightly lower. The Government officially recognizes only three minority religious communities—Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians, and Jews—although other non-Muslim communities exist. The level of religious observance varied throughout the country, in part due to the influence of secular traditions and official restrictions on religious expression in political and social life.

In addition to the country's Sunni Muslim majority, academics estimated there were 15 to 20 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 indigenous to Anatolia as well. Some Alevis practice rituals that include men and women worshipping together through oratory, poetry, and dance. The Government considers Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; however, some Alevis and absolutist Sunnis maintain that Alevis are not Muslims.

There are several other religious groups, mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities. While exact membership figures are not available, these religious groups include approximately 65,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians, 23,000 Jews, and up to 4,000 Greek Orthodox Christians. The Government interpreted the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as granting special legal minority status exclusively to these three groups, although the treaty text refers broadly to "non-Muslim minorities" without listing specific groups. However, this recognition does not extend to the religious leadership organs; for example, the Ecumenical (Greek Orthodox) and Armenian Patriarchates continue to seek legal recognition of their status, the absence of which prevents them from having the right to own and transfer property and train religious clergy.

There also are approximately 10,000 Baha'is; an estimated 15,000 Syrian Orthodox (Syriac) Christians; 5,000 Yezidis; 3,300 Jehovah's Witnesses; 3,000 Protestants; and small, undetermined numbers of Bulgarian, Chaldean, Nestorian, Georgian, Roman Catholic, and Maronite Christians. The number of Syriac Christians in the southeast was once high; however, under pressure from Government authorities and later under the impact of the war against the terrorist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), many Syriacs migrated to Istanbul, Western Europe, or North and South America. Over the last several years, small numbers of Syriacs returned from overseas to the southeast, mostly from Western Europe. In most cases, older family members returned while younger ones remained abroad.

Christian organizations estimate there are approximately 1,100 Christian missionaries in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on Muslims and other religious groups and on Muslim religious expression in Government offices, state-run institutions, and universities, usually for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state." The 1982 Constitution establishes the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of belief, freedom of worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas. However, other constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Core institutions of the state, including the presidency, armed forces, judiciary, and state bureaucracy, have played the role, written into the Constitution, of defending the country's tradition of secularism throughout the history of the republic. In some cases, elements of the state have opposed policies of the elected Government on the grounds that they threatened the secular state.

The Government oversees Muslim religious facilities and courses through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which is under the authority of the Prime Ministry. The Diyanet is responsible for regulating the operation of the country's more than 77,500 registered mosques and employing local and provincial imams, who are civil servants. Some groups, particularly Alevis, claimed that Diyanet policies reflected mainstream Sunni Islamic beliefs to the exclusion of other beliefs. However, the Government asserted that the Diyanet treated equally all who requested services.

A separate Government agency, the General Directorate for Foundations (GDF), regulates activities of non-Muslim religious groups and their affiliated churches, monasteries, synagogues, and related religious property. The GDF recognizes 161 "minority foundations," including Greek Orthodox foundations with approximately 61 sites, Armenian Orthodox foundations with approximately 50 sites, and Jewish foundations with 20 sites, as well as Syriac Christian, Chaldean, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian, and Maronite foundations. The GDF also regulates Muslim charitable religious foundations, including schools, hospitals, and orphanages. The GDF assesses whether the foundations are operating within the stated objectives of their organizational statute.

In 1936 the Government required all foundations to declare their sources of income. In 1974 amid political tensions over Cyprus, the High Court of Appeals ruled that the minority foundations had no right to acquire properties beyond those listed in the 1936 declarations. The court's ruling launched a process, under which the state seized control of properties acquired after 1936.

Minority religious groups, particularly the Greek and Armenian Orthodox communities, have lost numerous properties to the state in the past and continued to fight ongoing efforts by the state to expropriate properties. In many cases, the Government has expropriated property on the grounds that it is not being utilized. At least two appeals were filed in this regard: the Fener Boys School and the Buyukada Orphanage (the latter closed in 1964).These cases are often appealed to the Council of State ("Danistay") and, if unsuccessful there, to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Many religious minorities experienced problems operating places of worship due to laws governing foundations.

The law restricting religious property rights was amended in 2002 to permit minority foundations to acquire property; however, the Government continued during the reporting period to apply an article which allows it to expropriate properties in areas where the local non-Muslim population drops significantly or where the foundation is deemed to no longer perform the function for which it was created. There is no specific minimum threshold concerning such a population drop, rather it is left to the discretion of GDF. This is particularly problematic for communities with smaller populations, such as the Greek Orthodox community.

The law allows the 161 religious minority foundations recognized by the GDF to acquire property, and the GDF has approved 364 applications by non-Muslim foundations to acquire legal ownership of properties. However, the legislation does not allow the communities to reclaim the hundreds of properties affiliated with foundations expropriated by the state over the years. Parliament passed a law on November 9, 2006, that permitted the return of expropriated minority properties not already sold to third parties, and made it easier to form foundations. The President partially vetoed the law and stated that nine provisions of the legislation were incompatible with the Constitution, the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, or current law. The law was awaiting parliamentary review by the close of this reporting period. Even before the veto, the final text of the law had disappointed many as it failed to ad-

dress the issue of restitution and ignored certain properties such as cemeteries and school assets not registered under any foundation. Foundations were unable to acquire legal ownership of properties registered under names of third parties, including properties registered under the names of saints or archangels, during periods when foundations could not own property in their own name.

Non-Muslim minorities complain that the implementing regulations of the law on foundations have led to interference in the elections of foundation boards, the treatment of charitable community foundations as business corporations for tax purposes, the freezing of revenue from real estate transactions, and a ban on transferring surplus income from one foundation to another. In other words, groups are disallowed from using funds from properties in one part of the country to support communities in other parts of the country. Renovation works by community foundations on properties that are considered historic require a permit from the local board of the protection of historical heritage.

Government authorities do not interfere in matters of doctrine pertaining to non-Muslim religious groups, 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 defacing its property.

Alevis freely practiced their beliefs and have built "cem houses" (places of gathering), although these have no legal status as places of worship, and are often referred to as "cultural centers." Representatives of Alevi organizations maintained that they often faced obstacles when attempting to establish cem houses. They said there were approximately 100 cem houses in the country, a number that they claimed was insufficient to meet their needs. There was a ground-breaking ceremony in January 2007 for a new cem house and cultural complex in Istanbul's Kadikoy district, with the support of the Kadikoy municipality. Alevis also opened a new cem house in Sivas in June 2007.

Alevis in the Kartal district of Istanbul continued to fight a court battle, which began in 2004, against a decision by local authorities to deny them permission to build a cem house.

In May 2006 authorities in the Sultanbeyli municipality of Istanbul reportedly banned the construction of a cem house on the grounds that the Pir Sultan Abdal Association, an Alevi group, had not acquired the necessary construction permits. Association officials said the local mayor and his staff had attended the groundbreaking ceremony and had promised not to interfere with the project; however, the municipality reportedly filed a case against the association after it proceeded with construction following the ban. The case continued at the end of the reporting period.

The Diyanet covers the utility costs of registered mosques, but not of cem houses and other places of worship that are not officially recognized.

Alevi children have the same compulsory religious education as all Muslims, and many Alevis alleged discrimination in the Government's failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools. Alevis currently have more than 4,000 court cases against the Ministry of Education regarding this alleged discrimination. The Government revealed in January 2007 its new religious course curriculum which was to include instruction on Alevism, but many Alevis believed the materials were inadequate and, in some cases false. Alevis also charged a bias in the Diyanet, which does not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership. Practically, the Diyanet budget is reserved for the Sunni community.

The Constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in primary and secondary schools. Religious minorities are exempted. However, a few religious minorities—such as Protestants—faced difficulty obtaining exemptions, particularly if their identification cards did not list a religion other than Islam. The Government claims that the religion courses cover the range of world religions; however, religious minorities asserted the courses reflect Sunni Islamic doctrine, which they maintained explains why non-Muslims are exempt.

In January 2004 an Alevi parent filed suit in the European Court of Human Rights, charging that the mandatory religion courses violate religious freedom; the case of *Zengin* v. *Turkey* is ongoing.

In November 2006 an Istanbul court announced its ruling in favor of an Alevi father who requested that his son be exempt from the religion courses at school; however, the Istanbul Governor's office appealed the decision and the case was still under Council of State (highest administrative court) review at the close of the reporting period. Six similar cases were filed in different parts of the country and remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

Officially recognized religious minorities may operate schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The curriculum of these schools includes Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish instruction. Such schools are required to appoint a Muslim as deputy principal; reportedly, these deputies have more authority than their nominal supervisors. Additionally, regulations have made it somewhat difficult for non-Muslims to register and attend these schools. The Ministry of National Education reportedly checks to make sure that the child's father or (as of 2006) mother is from the minority community before the child may enroll. Moreover, non-Muslim minorities that are not officially recognized do not have schools of their own.

The Caferis, the country's principal Shi'a community, numbering between 500,000 and 1 million (concentrated mostly in eastern Turkey and Istanbul), do not face restrictions on their religious freedoms. They build and operate their own mosques and appoint their own imams; however, as with the Alevis, their places of worship have no legal status and receive no support from the Diyanet.

Churches operating in the country generally face administrative challenges to employ foreign church personnel, apart from the Catholic Church and congregations linked to the diplomatic community. These administrative challenges, plus restrictions on training religious leaders and difficulties getting visas, have led to decreases in the Christian communities.

The Government has also increased efforts to comply with ECHR decisions. As a signatory to the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the country is subject to the court's jurisdiction. Two relatively recent cases filed by the Association of Protestant Churches are *Zekai Tanyar and Others* v. *Turkey* and *Altinkaynak and Others* v. *Turkey*. Tanyar involves the inability to register churches and other places of worship and problems of lack of registration and legal status. *Altinkaynak* involves a complaint regarding the zoning of property as a place of worship.

In January 2007 the ECHR ruled in favor of the Fener Greek Orthodox High School Foundation concerning two of its properties expropriated in 1996. The verdict held that the Government violated the foundation's rights to property and ordered the return of the property or the payment of 910,000 Euro in compensation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, state policy imposes some restrictions on religious groups and on religious expression in Government offices and state-run institutions, including universities.

Secularists in the military, judiciary, and other branches of the bureaucracy continued to speak out against what they label as Islamic fundamentalism. These groups view religious fundamentalism as a threat to the secular state. The National Security Council categorizes religious fundamentalism as a threat to public safety. President Sezer delivered a speech in April 2007 in which he repeated concerns that separatism and religious fundamentalism are threats facing the country. The President stated that the "fundamentalist threat has been following the Republic as a sinister shadow since its establishment."

Also in April 2007, subsequent to the nomination of the ruling party's presidential candidate, the Turkish General Staff on its Web site warned of the dangers of "fundamentalism" and declared its determination to defend the secular state.

According to human rights NGO Mazlum-Der and other groups, a few Government ministries have dismissed or barred from promotion civil servants suspected of anti-state or Islamist activities. Reports by Mazlum-Der, the media, and others indicated that the military periodically dismissed religiously observant Muslims from military service. Such dismissals were based on behavior that military officials believed identified these individuals as Islamic fundamentalists, which they were concerned could indicate disloyalty to the secular state.

According to Mazlum-Der, the military charged soldiers with lack of discipline for activities that included performing Muslim prayers or being married to women who wore headscarves. According to the military, officers and noncommissioned officers were periodically dismissed for ignoring repeated warnings from superior officers and maintaining ties to what the military considered Islamic fundamentalist organizations. In November 2006 the Government reported 37 military dismissals of which it claimed 2 were associated with religious extremism. An additional 17 were reportedly expelled in August 2006 for unspecified disciplinary reasons.

Mystical Sufi and other religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats) have been banned officially since the mid-1920s; however, tarikats and cemaats remain active and widespread. Some prominent political and social leaders continue to associate with tarikats, cemaats, and other Islamic communities.

In late April 2007 police arrested four street evangelists in Istanbul for "missionary activity," disturbing the peace, and insulting Islam. The arrested included a U.S. citizen, one Korean, and two Turks. The American was released 48 hours after his arrest, although he reported a state prosecutor visited neither him nor the Korean. The claim of insulting Islam was based on a book the evangelists were giving out, which explained that Christians cannot accept the Qur'an because it contradicts some of the teachings of the New Testament. The prosecutor ultimately charged the evangelists with a single misdemeanor of disturbing the peace.

Jehovah's Witnesses continued to engage in a legal battle over their efforts to form an association. In April 2006 an Istanbul court rejected a lawsuit to cancel the Jehovah's Witnesses' newly formed association. Pending the prosecutor's subsequent appeal, the Jehovah's Witnesses may not conduct meetings as an association. In December 2006 the Jehovah's Witnesses filed a request to expedite the case with the Court of Appeals. The request was still pending at the end of the reporting period.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported continuing official harassment of their worship services because they were not members of an officially recognized religion. Police arrested 25-year-old member Feti Demirtas and sent him to prison on 9 occasions for conscientiously objecting to military service, as his religion requires. According to Jehovah's Witness officials, harassment of their members included arrests, court hearings, verbal and physical abuse, and psychiatric evaluations.

Religious minorities report difficulties opening, maintaining, and operating houses of worship. 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 GDF, often take place on diplomatic property or in private apartments. Police occasionally bar Christians from holding services in private apartments, and prosecutors have opened cases against Christians for holding unauthorized gatherings.

Article 219 of the penal code prohibits imams, priests, rabbis, or other religious leaders from "reproaching or vilifying" the Government or the laws of the state while performing their duties. Violations are punishable by prison terms of 1 month to 1 year, or 3 months to 2 years if the crime involves inciting others to disobey the law.

The authorities continued to monitor the activities of Eastern Orthodox churches but generally did not interfere with their religious activities; however, significant restrictions were placed on the administration of the churches. The Government does not recognize the ecumenical status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, acknowledging him only as the head of the country's Greek Orthodox community. High-level Government leaders often assert publicly that use of the term "ecumenical" in reference to the Patriarch violates the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. However, Government officials privately acknowledge that Lausanne does not address the issue. On June 26, 2007, the Higher Court of Appeals ("Yargitay") reiterated the Government's public position despite ruling in favor of the Patriarchate in a case brought against it by a defrocked Bulgarian Orthodox priest.

The Government has also long maintained that only citizens of the country can be members of the Church's Holy Synod and participate in patriarchal elections, despite the Ecumenical Patriarch's appeal to allow non-Turkish prelates. However, the Government did not formally respond to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's 2004 appointment of 6 noncitizen metropolitans to the Holy Synod, representing the first appointment of noncitizens to the body in the 80-year history of the country.

Members of the Greek Orthodox community said the legal restrictions particularly threatened the survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul because, with no more than 4,000 Greek Orthodox remaining in the country, the community was becoming too small to provide enough Turkish citizen prelate candidates to maintain the institution.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul continued to seek to reopen the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli in the Sea of Marmara. The Government closed the seminary in 1971 when the Patriarchate chose not to comply with a state requirement for all private institutions of higher learning to nationalize; the Patriarchate found it impossible to comply. Government officials have reportedly not responded to formal communications from the Greek Orthodox Church regarding the re-opening of Halki Seminary and resolutions to other concerns affecting the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The state provides training for Sunni Islamic clergy; religious communities outside the Sunni Islamic mainstream cannot legally train new clergy in the country for eventual leadership. Co-religionists from outside the country were permitted to

assume leadership positions in some cases, but in general all religious community leaders, including patriarchs and chief rabbis, must be citizens.

In April 2005 the Ecumenical Patriarchate filed an appeal with the ECHR concerning the GDF's expropriation of the Buyukada Orphanage on the Prince's Islands that had belonged to the Patriarchate. On June 12, 2007, the ECHR announced its decision to hear the case.

In March 2007 the Yedikule Surp Pirgic Armenian Hospital Foundation in Istanbul dropped an ECHR claim when the Government agreed to return two properties and pay approximately $20,000 (€15,000) compensation for court expenses to the foundation. The Treasury had attempted to sell one of the properties in March 2005 to a private company, but the Finance Ministry blocked the sale. The ECHR continued proceedings related to the appeal by the Armenian Orthodox community of the 1999 expropriation of two other foundation properties.

No law explicitly prohibits proselytizing or religious conversions; however, many prosecutors and police regarded proselytizing and religious activism with suspicion. Police occasionally prevented Christians from handing out religious literature. The Government reported 157 conversions, including 92 to Islam and 63 from Islam to a different religion. Proselytizing is often considered socially unacceptable; Christians performing missionary work were occasionally 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.

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. University students who wear head coverings at public universities are officially not permitted to register for classes, although some faculty members permit students to wear head coverings in class.

Many secularists accuse Islamists of using advocacy for wearing the headscarf as a political tool and fear that efforts to repeal the headscarf ban will lead to pressure against women who choose not to wear a head covering. In 2005 the ECHR ruled that Turkish universities have the right to ban the headscarf.

In February 2006 the Council of State ruled in favor of a decision by education authorities to revoke the promotion of an Ankara teacher to a military compound-based nursery school principal position on the grounds that the teacher regularly wore an Islamic headscarf outside of school. Some journalists and religious rights advocates asserted that the court's decision effectively expanded the headscarf ban into the private sphere. The court, however, maintained that the teacher had violated the principle of secularism in education by wearing the headscarf while traveling to and from school.

In May 2006 attorney Alparslan Arslan opened fire in the Council of State court responsible for the February 2006 ruling, killing Judge Mustafa Yucel Ozbilgin and injuring four other judges. His case was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

In April 2007 four suspects were arrested after an armed assailant was caught preparing for an attack against the president of the Higher Board of Education. The assailant reportedly planned the attack because he was angry with the decisions and statements of the Board president. Some Islamists see the Board as responsible for the headscarf ban in universities.

A 1997 law made 8 years of secular education compulsory. After completing the 8 years, students may pursue study at imam hatip (Islamic preacher) high schools, which cover both the standard high school curriculum and Islamic theology and practice. Imam hatip schools are classified as vocational, and graduates of vocational schools face an automatic reduction in their university entrance exam grades if they apply for university programs outside their field of high school specialization. This reduction effectively bars most imam hatip graduates from enrolling in university programs other than theology. Many pious citizens criticized the religious instruction provided in the regular schools as inadequate. Most families who enrolled their children in imam hatip schools did so to expose them to more extensive religious education, not to train them as imams.

In May 2007 the Council of State ruled as illegal a 2005 regulation issued by the Education Ministry, which would have allowed imam hatip students to earn degrees from regular high schools by taking distance learning courses.

Only the Diyanet is authorized to provide religion courses outside of school, although clandestine private courses do exist. Students who complete the first 5 years of primary school may enroll in Diyanet Qur'an classes on weekends and during summer vacation. Many Qur'an courses function unofficially. Only children 12 and

older may legally register for official Qur'an courses, and Mazlum-Der reported that law enforcement authorities often raided illegal courses for younger children.

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 Syriac and Armenian Orthodox properties.

Religious affiliation is listed on national identity cards, despite 1982 Constitutional Article 24 which provides that no one shall be compelled to reveal religious beliefs. A few religious groups, such as the Baha'i, are unable to state their religious affiliation on their cards because they are not included among the options; they have made their concerns known to the Government. In April 2006 Parliament adopted legislation allowing persons to leave the religion section of their identity cards blank or change the religious designation by written application. However, the Government reportedly continued to restrict applicants' choice of religion; members of the Baha'i community said Government officials had told them that, despite the new law, they would still not be able to list their religion on the cards.

There were reports that local officials harassed some persons who converted from Islam to another religion when they sought to amend their cards. Some non-Muslims maintained that listing religious affiliation on the cards exposed them to discrimination and harassment. In 2005 an Alevi citizen filed a case with the ECHR seeking the deletion of the religious affiliation section on national identity cards. A decision in the case was still pending at the end of the reporting period.

In October 2004 the Government's Human Rights Consultation Board issued a report on minorities, which stated that non-Muslims were effectively barred from careers in state institutions, such as the armed forces, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Police, and the National Intelligence Agency. Professors Baskin Oran and Ibrahim Kaboglu faced criminal charges for their roles as principal authors of the report. An Ankara court acquitted them in May 2006. Members of minority religious communities confirmed the report's conclusions. They said non-Muslim citizens were viewed as foreigners and were therefore considered unqualified to represent the state.

In February 2007 2 of the 74 defendants charged in connection with the November 2003 terrorist bombings of 2 synagogues, the British Consulate and a bank were sentenced to "heavy" (no chance of parole) life in prison; 5 were sentenced to life in prison; 41 received 3- to 18-year sentences; and 26 were acquitted.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

After the April 18, 2007, killings in Malatya of three Christians, Turkish victim Ugur Yuksel was denied a Christian burial and given an Islamic/Alevitic burial instead. Turkish victim Necati Aydin was buried in a Protestant churchyard in Izmir. The Governor of Malatya was initially hesitant to permit the burial of the German victim in Malatya. He told the German victim's widow that no Christian should be buried in Turkish soil. However, after negotiations between German Government and Turkish Government officials, the victim was buried in a private Armenian cemetery in Malatya.

In October 2006 a prosecutor pressed criminal charges against two (Muslim) converts to Christianity for violating Article 301 ("insulting Turkishness"), inciting hatred against Islam, and secretly compiling data on private citizens for a Bible correspondence course. If convicted, the men could be sentenced to 6 months to 3 years in prison. On the basis of reports that defendants were approaching grade and high school students in Silivri and attempting to convert them to Christianity, police searched one man's home, then went to the mens' office and confiscated two computers, as well as books and papers. The three plaintiffs claimed that the Christians called Islam a "primitive and fabricated religion" and described Turks as a "cursed people." The accused denied all charges. The case continued at the end of the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In March 2007 the Government held a ceremony to reopen the 10th century Armenian Holy Cross Church on Akdamar Island as a memorial museum after a long restoration process that it had funded. By the end of the reporting period, the Gov-

ernment was still considering a request by the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul to allow the placement of a cross on the building.

In August 2006 the Istanbul Protestant Church finalized the legal procedure for officially registering its building as a "place of worship." This was the first time that the Government had approved a request for such status in the zoning plan.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Some violent attacks and threats against non-Muslims during the reporting period created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslims. Public debates ensued over the Government's response to these attacks and threats. Religious pluralism was widely viewed as a threat to Islam and to "national unity." A few Muslims, Christians, Baha'is, and members of other religious communities faced societal suspicion and mistrust.

Jews and Christians from most denominations freely practiced their religions and reported little discrimination in daily life. However, citizens who converted from Islam to another religion often experienced some form of social harassment or pressure from family and neighbors. Proselytizing on behalf of non-Muslim religious groups was socially unacceptable and sometimes dangerous. A variety of newspapers and television shows regularly published and broadcast anti-Christian messages, and at least one municipality distributed anti-missionary publications. Anti-missionary and anti-Christian rhetoric appears to have continued among Government officials and national media sources such as *Hurriyet* and *Millyet*. Government ministers, such as Mehmet Aydin, Minister of State in charge of religious affairs, called missionaries "separatist and destructive."

Additionally, nationalist sentiments sometimes contained anti-Christian or anti-Semitic overtones. Jewish community members reported a significant rise of anti-Semitic language in newspapers and Web sites in the past few years, as well as increased societal antagonism and discrimination during the July–August 2006 conflict involving Israel and Lebanon. There were growing numbers of media stories about Israeli and U.S. misdeeds in Iraq and pieces containing anti-Semitic stereotyping. Jewish leaders in the country believed the anti-Semitism is directly related to events in the Middle East, and Jewish community members reported that they are held responsible for these events.

There were reports of religiously motivated killings during the reporting period.

On April 18, 2007, three members of a Protestant church in Malatya, including a German citizen, were tortured and killed in the office of a company that publishes books on Christianity. The suspects of the killings had notes on their persons claiming, "We did it for our religion. May this be a lesson to the enemies of religion."

Four suspects were caught as they were trying to leave the building while another jumped out of a window and was hospitalized. Five out of eleven suspects detained after the killings remained in custody at the end of the reporting period. Some reports suggest the publishing house and the victims received death threats for a year before the killings, but the local police did not provide protection. Apparently the suspects had spent months gaining the trust of the victims under the guise of an interest in the Christian faith.

In October 2006 a local court convicted and sentenced a 16-year-old to life in prison with no chance of parole for the February 2006 assassination of Catholic Priest Andrea Santoro while he was praying in church after Mass in Trabzon. The sentence was later reduced to 18 years' and 10 months' in prison because the assailant was under the age of 18.

There were multiple religiously motivated attacks on persons during the reporting period. On May 28, 2007, two Georgian priests touring the country were beaten in Artvin because they were believed to be missionaries. In February 2007 two persons fired guns in the air after a memorial service commemorating the 40th day following the Hrant Dink assassination. The suspects were arrested shortly after the incident and reportedly claimed they intended to target Armenian Patriarch Mesrob II, who presided over the ceremony.

In December 2006 the pastor of an Eskisehir church in the municipality of Tepebashi was severely beaten in a park. The church did not file a report or complaint because they did not want to "damage the image of the city." In September 2006 an American missionary and a team of five street evangelists were physically attacked but received only minor injuries. Local police helped the Christians receive treatment at a nearby hospital.

On July 2, 2006, a schizophrenic, Atilla Nuran, stabbed a French Catholic priest in Samsun. After questioning, the police brought Nuran before a criminal court, and he was committed to a psychiatric hospital for examination. Nuran had visited the

priest's church since 1998 and claimed the church was trying to Christianize Muslim youth. Since then, the church's lawyer has won court cases against Nuran for libeling the church.

In March 2006 an assailant entered a Catholic Church in Mersin, threatening church members with a knife and shouting anti-Christian statements. Police arrived at the scene and arrested the assailant. Although the church did not press charges, the assailant is serving a 6-year prison sentence after being convicted by a court for stealing a cell phone from the church.

In February 2006 a group of young men beat and threatened to kill a Catholic friar in Izmir. The attackers shouted anti-Christian slogans and said they wanted to "clean Turkey of non-Muslims." By the end of the reporting period, authorities had not opened a case against the suspects.

In January 2006 five assailants severely beat Protestant church leader Kamil Kiroglu in Adana. One attacker wielded a knife and threatened to kill Kiroglu unless he renounced Christianity. The Government did not investigate the incident or make any arrests, and Kiroglu did not press charges.

There were also multiple religiously motivated attacks on property during the reporting period. Three attacks were reported against the Eskisehir church in the municipality of Tepebasi in May 2007. On May 19, the church was attacked with a Molotov cocktail bomb. The prior (second) incident occurred while the police watching the building had left to assist an incident elsewhere in the city. The church asked the Government for protection and claims that the Government is not taking their request seriously. In early May 2007 there was an attempted arson, but the fire was noticed early and damage was minimal.

On April 21, 2007, the International Protestant Church in Ankara was firebombed with Molotov cocktails. Local police investigated the attack promptly. In March 2007 a hand grenade was thrown into the courtyard of the President of the Syriac Churches Foundation in Mardin's Midyat district. The police started an investigation, but there were no reports of arrests following the incident.

On January 28, 2007, vandals attacked the building of the Agape Church Foundation in Samsun, shattering the windows with rocks and spray painting street signs early Sunday morning. The pastor said a note was left inside the church, but police refused to show it to him, claiming it "wasn't important." The police chief refused to include the note in the official investigation. Four days before the attack, the Black Sea online site Kuzeyhaber published a column praising efforts to stop the spread of Christianity in Samsun.

On November 4, 2006, the Odemis Protestant Church in Izmir was attacked with Molotov Cocktails, following repeated stone throwing and harassment in the weeks before.

There were instances of citizens disrupting church services. In May 2006 a group of nationalist and leftist protestors attempted to disrupt a Greek Orthodox Christian mass at a historical church in Bergama. In April 2006 a group of young men entered the Syriac compound in Diyarbakir and shouted threats at church members. Police refused to send patrols to the neighborhood of the church until a few days later, when the church's Easter ceremonies were held.

Death threats against Christian American citizens continue to be a concern. For example, Christian American citizens living in the country received religion-based death threats via letters and voicemails, stating that if they did not return to America they would be killed.

Despite the widespread condemnation of the Malatya killings, threats and incidents of attempted violence against Protestants continue to be documented. Two pastors, one in Diyarkbakir and one in Samsun, expressed fears they were being targeted for harassment and might be killed. The pastor of a church in Samsun has received many death threats in the past few years. During the period covered by the report, he received a threat claiming, "it will be worse than Malatya" if he does not leave. He also received two death threats by e-mail on January 28, 2007, the day his church was attacked. One was signed by the Turkish Vengeance Brigade. One email threatened to kill him and another cursed his congregation. Prior to this, the church suffered a dozen stoning attacks and weekly e-mail threats.

Other demonstrations of religious discrimination and hatred were documented. In the May 2007 deposition of accused Malatya killer Emre Gunaydin, he told police investigators his original purpose was to frighten the victims from spreading propaganda but that he had become angry when they said, "in the end, everyone will worship Jesus" and could not control his actions. He also revealed that he planned to kill a different Christian. A newspaper editor published the deposition, including the intended victim's name, stating that local security police gave him a copy.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom matters 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, enjoyed close relations with the Muslim majority and other religious groups. The U.S. Embassy continued to urge the Government to permit the reopening of the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island.

In November 2006 the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom visited Istanbul and Ankara and met with senior Government officials, leaders of religious minority communities, political parties, NGOs, business organizations and intellectuals to discuss religious freedom in the country.

Also in November 2006 the Ambassador and Consul General attended numerous interfaith events associated with Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the country.

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. The Ambassador met with Diyanet President Ali Bardakoglu and with religious minority leaders including Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Chief Rabbi Isak Haleva, and Armenian Orthodox Patriarch Mesrob II to show support for religious freedom and to discuss concerns affecting their respective communities.

Other Embassy and consulate officers held similar meetings with Government officials. Following the Malatya killings, officials met with the Governor of Istanbul to ensure local safety concerns were addressed. Diplomats from the Embassy and Consulates met regularly with representatives of the various religious groups. These meetings covered a range of topics, including problems faced by non-Muslim groups and the debate over the role of Islam in the country.

The Istanbul Consul General hosted an event in honor of Alliance of Civilization leaders and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom attended by religious freedom experts in various fields.

The Embassy's human rights officer gave a speech promoting religious tolerance during a Baha'i hosted International Religious Freedom Day event.

The mission utilizes the International Visitor Program to introduce professionals in various fields to the United States and American counterparts. Religious topics are included among these programs.

UKRAINE

The Constitution and the law on freedom of conscience provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were isolated problems at the local level due to local officials taking sides in disputes between religious organizations.

There was no 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. Property restitution problems remained; however, the Government continued to facilitate the return of some communal properties.

There were instances of societal abuse and discrimination, including cases of anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism. The All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches, Conference of Representatives of Christian Churches of Ukraine, and Ukrainian Interchurch Council continued their work to resolve differences between various denominations 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 and raise concerns about anti-Semitism. U.S. Embassy representatives also raised concerns about anti-Semitism with local officials and promoted ethnic and religious tolerance through public outreach events.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 233,000 square miles and a population of 47 million. A 2007 survey by the independent think tank Razumkov Center found that 40 percent of the respondents considered themselves believers not belonging to any denomination, while 36.5 percent consider themselves to be believers of a particular religious organization. Of the latter group, 33 percent affiliate themselves with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC–KP), 31 percent with the

Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC–MP), 18 percent with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and 2.5 percent with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). Less than 5 percent of those surveyed declared themselves Roman Catholics, Protestants; Muslims, or Jews. Almost 21 percent of the respondents declared that they do not believe in God.

According to the 2007 survey, of those who considered themselves believers of a particular religious group, 33.5 percent said they attend religious services 1–2 times per year; 23 percent once in several months; 14.4 percent 1–3 times per month; 8.8 percent once per week; 2 percent several times per week; 6.4 percent once in several years; and 9.3 percent almost never. Almost 90 percent of religiously active citizens are Christians, the majority Orthodox. Religious practice is generally strongest in the western part of the country.

According to Government statistics, the UOC–MP has 38 eparchies and 11,085 communities located in large numbers in all the regions, with the exception of the Ivano-Frankivs'k, Lviv, and Ternopil Oblasts. The UOC–MP refers to itself, and is officially registered as, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The UOC–KP has 30 eparchies, 3,882 communities—most of which are located in western and some central oblasts—and 2,867 clergy members. Approximately 60 percent of UOC–KP followers live in the western part of the country. The UOC–KP is not recognized by the UOC–MP. The UAOC is the smallest of the 3 Orthodox churches, with 12 eparchies, 1,155 communities—approximately 70 percent of them in the western part of the country—and 671 clergy members.

Adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) constitute the second largest group of believers after the Christian Orthodox groups. The UGCC has 9 eparchies, 2 exarchates, 3,480 communities, and 2,191 clergy members. The UGCC's members, who constitute a majority of the believers in the western region, number approximately four million.

Some Muslim leaders estimate that there are 2 million Muslims in the country, although estimates by the Government and independent think tanks put the number at approximately 500,000. There are 487 registered Muslim communities, 368 of them on the Crimean peninsula. Sheikh Akhmed Tamim, the country's mufti, heads the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine (SDMU), which has 64 registered communities and 49 clerics and is a member of the All-Ukraine Council. According to Sheikh Tamim, approximately 50,000 Muslims, mostly foreign, live in Kyiv. The majority of the country's Muslims are Crimean Tatars, numbering approximately 300,000 and constituting the third-largest ethnic group in Crimea. Most are members of Muslim communities run by the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Crimea, the country's largest Muslim center. The directorate, headed by Mufti Emirali Ablayev, has 332 registered communities and 332 clerics. The Crimean Tatars have their own governing council (Crimean Tatar Mejlis) and language (Crimean Tatar). Crimea's majority ethnic Russian population is predominantly affiliated with the UOC–MP.

The Association of Civic Organizations-Arraid is a Muslim umbrella organization with 14 regional branches across the country and is one of the country's largest Muslim organizations, although membership statistics are not available. The Independent Spiritual Center of Muslims of Ukraine has 19 registered communities, most of them in the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

The Roman Catholic Church is traditionally associated with historical pockets of citizens of Polish ancestry, who live mainly in the central and western regions. It has 7 dioceses, 890 communities, and 527 clergy members serving approximately 1 million persons.

Protestant churches have grown rapidly in the years since independence. In Donetsk Oblast, which many consider to be dominated by the UOC–MP, more than 600 of the 1,371 registered religious communities are Protestant. The Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine (the Baptist Union) is the largest group, claiming more than 300,000 members in more than 2,800 churches, with 3,160 clergy members. Other growing communities include Anglicans, Calvinists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostals, Presbyterians, and Seventh-day Adventists.

According to a 2001 census, the State Committee of Statistics estimated that there were 103,600 persons of ethnic Jewish origin in the country. Some Jewish community leaders, however, estimated that 170,000 citizens were born to a Jewish mother and as many as 370,000 were eligible to immigrate to Israel because of their Jewish heritage. The 2004 All-Ukraine Sociological Service poll appeared to corroborate the higher figure. Observers believe that 35 to 40 percent of the Jewish population is active communally. There are 240 registered Jewish organizations. Most observant Jews are Orthodox. There are 104 Chabad-Lubavitch communities in the country; the Progressive (Reform) Jewish movement has 48 communities.

The Government estimates that there are more than 15 nontraditional religious movements. As of January 1, 2007, 35 Krishna Consciousness communities and 53 Buddhist communities were registered.

Foreign religious workers are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and the law on freedom of conscience provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels generally sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no formal state religion; however, local authorities frequently favored the religious majority in a particular region. In some areas of the east and south, they tended to favor the UOC–MP. Conversely, in the western part of the country, local authorities at times supported the UGCC and UOC–KP.

The UOC–MP and major Protestant denominations expressed concern over President Yushchenko's continued efforts to encourage the UOC–MP and UOC–KP to overcome the schism between the two largest Orthodox communities. They believed unification to be a matter better resolved by the churches themselves.

The country officially celebrates numerous religious holidays, including Christmas, Easter Monday, and Holy Trinity Day, all according to the Julian calendar shared by the Orthodox churches and the Greek Catholics.

The law requires religious groups to register their "articles and statutes" either as a local or a national organization and to have at least 10 adult members to obtain the status of a "juridical entity." Registration is necessary to conduct many business activities, including publishing, banking, and property transactions. By law the registration process should take 1 month, or 3 months if the Government requests an expert opinion on the group's legitimacy. Registration denials may be appealed in court. The Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and the Law on the State Registration of Legal Entities and Private Individuals contain contradictory provisions complicating registration of religious organizations. Despite repeated calls by the All-Ukraine Council and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Parliament had not resolved the matter at the end of the period covered by this report.

On November 8, 2006, the Cabinet of Ministers formed the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions (SCNR), replacing the former State Committee for Nationalities and Migration and former State Department of Religious Affairs. The SCNR administers the registration process. Representatives from several denominations were concerned that the restructuring would negatively affect the committee's work, but some acknowledged that the reorganized committee needed more time to prove its effectiveness. Several denominations, as well as the Ukrainian Interchurch Council in a separate public statement on November 29, 2006, expressed concern that former Communist parliamentary faction member Georgiy Popov was appointed as acting chairman of the SCNR.

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, there were no reports that the Government used the law to limit the activity of such religious organizations. Religious worker visas require invitations from registered religious organizations in the country and the approval of the Government. Foreign religious workers may preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other religious activities "only in those religious organizations that invited them to the country and with official approval of the governmental body that registered the statutes and the articles of the pertinent religious organization." According to the Government, no visa applications by foreign religious workers were rejected during the period covered by this report. Mormon leaders believed that the law is poorly written in regard to missionary work, and they experienced problems with regional officials limiting where missionaries can carry out their activities.

By law religion cannot be part of the public school curriculum. The UGCC, as well as members of the Jewish and Muslim communities, continued to support amending the law to allow for private religious schools. There were few tangible results from the 2005 presidential decree to introduce "ethics of faith" training courses into public school curriculums. The decree had the support of the country's four top Christian clergymen, but nationwide implementation was initially haphazard and was further delayed because of concerns raised by Jewish and Muslim leaders that training courses were based on Christian teachings. According to the State Committee

on Nationalities and Religion, plans were in place to implement ethics training based on an interconfessional approach.

According to the law, registered religious organizations maintain a privileged status as the only organizations permitted to seek restitution of communal property confiscated by the Soviet regime. Communities must apply to regional authorities for property restitution. While consideration of a restitution claim should be completed within a month, it frequently takes much longer.

Various religious organizations have religious schools to train their clerics and missionaries. Under the law these schools belong to their respective religious organizations and have the status of religious organizations.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by frequently consulting with the All-Ukraine Council, which represents the religious groups of more than 90 percent of the religiously active population. The council, which has a rotating chairmanship, meets once every 2 or 3 months, providing members and Government representatives the opportunity to discuss interfaith concerns. The council also provides a forum through which religious organizations can consult with the Government on relevant draft legislation. The Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches had eight members representing 80 percent of the country's Protestant organizations.

On June 12, 2007, legislation was signed into law giving military members the right to express their religious or atheistic convictions openly and to buy, possess, and use religious literature and items. It also allows alternative nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors and bans the creation of religious organizations in military institutions and military units.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

On June 14, 2007, the European Court of Human Rights upheld the claim of the Svyato-Mykhaylivska parish against the Kyiv city administration. The legal dispute began in the early 1990s when the parish sought to reregister from the UOC–MP to the UOC–KP. The jury found the Government guilty of violating religious freedom for not allowing the parishioners to register their parish according to their preferences.

Mormon leaders in Kyiv complained that on March 30, 2007, the Rivne Oblast administration ruled that Mormon missionaries could not preach outside houses of worship, thus significantly limiting the missionaries' activities. Mormon leaders attributed problems in their relations with the oblast government to the fact that the Religious Affairs Sector of the Rivne Oblast state administration was headed by a cleric of the UOC–KP. They noted that the oblast administration's decision contradicts a 1999 ruling by the former State Committee for Religious Affairs that its missionaries could freely carry out their work regardless of location.

In February 2007 the Zhytomyr Oblast Archives, with the approval of the National Archives, ordered the seizure of Torah scrolls that had been returned to the Jewish community in 2004 after having been in the possession of the Government since Soviet times. The Jewish community disputed the archives' claims that some of the scrolls had been damaged or gone missing. The scrolls were to remain with the oblast archives until the Interagency Commission on Restitution decides on their final disposition. The oblast governor and SCNR supported the return of the scrolls to the Jewish community.

On November 6, 2006, the Crimean Tatar radio station Meidan and the ATR television channel issued an open letter to Anatoliy Hrytsenko, chairman of the Supreme Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, protesting the airing of a documentary, "Brides of Allah," from the television series *Sovershenno Sekretno,* produced by Russian Channel NTV. According to journalists, the voiceover on the documentary included negative commentary on Muslims accompanied by video coverage of the war in Chechnya.

On September 26, 2006, the media reported that the Local Council of Ivanivka, Luhansk Oblast, issued a resolution to ban "totalitarian activity" in the territory of Ivanivka in response to plans by a Protestant congregation to hold a Christian music concert near a local recreational center. The congregation requested the Luhansk Oblast prosecutor to suspend the resolution. According to a local NGO, the local authorities eventually allowed the congregation to hold the concert. Congregation members complained that local government representatives disrupted the concert and verbally abused them.

Restitution of communal property confiscated by the Soviet regime remained a problem. The slow pace of restitution was partly a reflection of the country's economic situation, which limited funds available to relocate occupants of seized religious property. In addition, intracommunal competition for particular properties complicated restitution claims for the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities. The SCNR declared that the majority of buildings and objects had already been re-

turned to religious organizations and that many of the remaining properties for which restitution was being sought were complicated by that fact they were occupied by state institutions, were historic landmarks, or had been transferred to private ownership. The SCNR also noted that restitution claims frequently fall under the jurisdiction of local governments.

All major religious organizations called on the Government to establish a transparent legal process to address restitution claims. The All-Ukraine Council called on Parliament to impose a moratorium on the privatization of previously confiscated religious buildings in state and communal ownership, but Parliament did not adopt such legislation. Representatives of the four largest Christian denominations as well as smaller communities expressed concern that local officials sometimes favored the majority religion in a particular region in matters of registration and restitution.

The UOC–MP and UGCC expressed concerns that the law provides no possibility for granting "legal entity" status to national religious associations. The lack of such status can complicate property ownership claims of church properties when congregations change denominations. However, the UOC–KP did not see a need for the granting of legal entity status to religious organizations in future legislation.

Leaders of the All-Ukrainian Pentecostal Union expressed concern about the continuing lack of support from the Kyiv Municipal Council in its efforts to obtain land in Kyiv to build its new headquarters and noted that the major orthodox churches and the UGCC had been allotted land. According to the Baptist Union, in 2006 the Kyiv Municipal Council handed over a former building of the central church at Bohdan Khmelnytsky Street in Kyiv to a private company. The site was being used as a hotel and casino.

The Karaite community in Kyiv continued to demand the return of a "kenesa" building (place of worship), which has been used as the "Actor's House" since Soviet times. According to the SNCR, the Kyiv Municipal Council had no intention to return the property.

Members of numerous communities described difficulties in dealing with the municipal administrations in Kyiv and other large cities to obtain land and building permits or to rent office space. However, these problems were not limited to religious groups and in many cases could be attributed to financial reasons rather than bias against a particular religious community.

Some representatives of the Jewish community complained that the city of Kyiv allocated funds for building houses of worship only to Orthodox churches. Representatives of progressive Jewish communities complained about property restitution difficulties with the Kharkiv and Kyiv municipal governments.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not transferred ownership of St. Nicholas' Cathedral and a former residence of bishops in Kyiv to the Roman Catholic Church. However, the Church was permitted to use the cathedral for daily morning Mass, on weekends, and during major religious holidays. Church representatives also expressed frustration about unrealized restitution claims of buildings formerly belonging to St. Oleksander's Church in Kyiv, which they stated were improperly privatized in the 1990s, as well as properties in Chernivtsi, Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Mykolayiv, Sevastopol, and Simferopol.

UOC–MP representatives complained that the local government in Lviv continued to ignore their numerous requests to allocate land for construction of a diocesan cathedral. UGCC Cardinal Huzar told the press that authorities in Lviv had not returned premises adjacent to St. George's Cathedral in Lviv. Local officials declared that the Government did not have the money to resettle more than a dozen families residing there since Soviet times.

Media outlets reported that on June 12, 2007, the Lviv Oblast Council allocated $100,000 (500,000 hryvnyas) for the reconstruction of a synagogue in Zhovkva along with funds to make emergency repairs and reconstruction to other historical heritage sites, including four Christian churches.

According to Roman Catholic Bishop Bronislav Bernatsky, the Government continued to refuse to facilitate the restitution of Odesa's Roman Catholic seminary, which was confiscated by the Soviet regime.

There was no progress in the resolution of the long-running dispute over the use of a Jewish cemetery in the Volyn Oblast town of Volodymyr-Volynsky. Local Jewish groups complained that the Ministry of Justice continued to refuse to help resolve this dispute.

Representatives of the Muslim community asserted that the slow pace of communal property restitution undermined the authority of moderate Muslim leaders. Muslim community leaders complained in particular about unresolved restitution claims involving a 118-year-old mosque in Mykolayiv, a famed mosque in Dnipropetrovsk, a 150-year-old mosque in the Crimean town of Masandra, a mosque

in Yalta, and the ruins of an 18th-century mosque in the Crimean coastal city of Alushta.

The SDMU complained that although the municipal government of Kyiv designated burial space for Muslims in a city cemetery, Christian burials had occurred on the designated land plot and the Muslim community still did not have adequate burial space.

Religious organizations, including members of the All-Ukraine Council, complained that despite their repeated requests Parliament did not adopt legislative amendments that would have given them the right to own or permanently use land plots. As a result they continued to pay commercial rates for renting the land on which places of worship and other religious buildings were located. They also complained that their organizations did not receive exemption from paying value-added taxes despite requests for a more favorable status.

In October 2006, with the urging of representatives of various religious groups, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych called for the resumption of the Interagency Commission on Restitution of Property to Religious Organizations. The commission, established in 2002 but active only intermittently, resumed its work in March 2007. The commission's primary goal was to return property to religious communities, and it took 316 restitution cases under consideration. The commission did not make any determinations during the period covered by this report, and some observers expressed concerns about its effectiveness and the transparency of its procedures.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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.

Anti-Semitism

On September 18, 2006, a group of young men shouting anti-Semitic insults attacked a Jewish man, who suffered a concussion as a result of the incident. According to a spokesman of the Odesa Jewish community, police investigated the incident but made no arrests.

There were several instances in which synagogues, cemeteries, and Holocaust memorials were severely vandalized, particularly in Odesa and Kirovohrad. In May 2007 approximately 20 gravestones in a Jewish cemetery were vandalized in Chernihiv. Also in May incidents of vandalism to synagogues in Dnepropetrovsk and Kolomiya were reported. Police investigated the vandalism but reported no results. In March 2007 vandals painted Nazi symbols on Holocaust memorials in Berdychiv, Zhytomyr Oblast, and Oleksandriya, Kirovohrad Oblast. Law enforcement agencies were investigating the incidents. On February 19, 2007, vandals desecrated a memorial to Jewish Holocaust victims, a memorial plaque in honor of Jewish activist Leon Pinsker, and more than 300 tombstones at the Third Jewish cemetery in Odesa, on which swastikas were drawn. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the local government, and representatives of all religious denominations and ethnic communities strongly condemned the desecration. Local and national law enforcement authorities quickly formed a task force that led to the arrests of three individuals who claimed they desecrated the monuments to see how the public would react. Police declared that none of the vandals belonged to extremist groups, although one of them said he was interested in Nazi literature. Some observers believed that there may have been more perpetrators due to the extent of the desecration. In Kirovohrad the Choral Synagogue was vandalized at least five separate times. According to representatives of the local Jewish community, law enforcement authorities made no progress in the investigation. Except for the arrests in the case of Odesa's Jewish cemetery, there were no other reports of effective police followup to cases of vandalism. In Zhytomyr police had made no criminal charges but continued their investigation in a case involving two teenagers who pleaded guilty to vandalizing several tombstones at an old Jewish cemetery in May 2006.

Anti-Semitic articles appeared frequently in small publications and irregular newsletters, although such articles rarely appeared in the national press. The Interregional Academy of Personnel Management (MAUP), which receives significant funding from several Middle Eastern government sources, remained the most persistent anti-Semitic presence. MAUP, a commuter college that claimed to have more than 50,000 students, published a monthly journal *Personnel* and a weekly newspaper *Personnel Plus*, which were the subjects of an ongoing criminal investigation by the Prosecutor General's Office. According to Jewish organizations, MAUP accounted for nearly 90 percent of all anti-Semitic material published in the country during the period covered by this report. In March 2006, 7 such affiliates, out of

approximately 50 across the country, were closed because of unspecified licensing violations; 30 more were closed before the September 27, 2006, commemoration of the Babyn Yar massacre, at which President Yushchenko criticized ethnic intolerance and religious hostility in the country. In November 2006 he issued a presidential order to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and Ministry of Science and Education to investigate manifestations of xenophobia at MAUP. In February 2007, following MAUP's successful appeal to the Kyiv Commercial Court, the Ministry of Education was ordered to restore the licenses of 26 regional branches. In May 2007 the mayor of Kyiv responded to the opening of a MAUP bookstand earlier in the month selling anti-Semitic literature near the site of the memorial to the victims of Babyn Yar massacre by closing it and promising to close other MAUP bookstands in the city. MAUP filed a lawsuit against the mayor for his order to remove the bookstand.

In fall 2006, after receiving complaints from the international community, the Government removed copies of the anti-Semitic publication *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* from Parliament, where it was being sold at kiosks.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 23, 2007, the Prosecutor General's Office dropped its investigation into claims that the All-Ukraine Baptist Union had illegally acquired its headquarters in downtown Kyiv. The Baptist Union, which had received unanimous support from members of the All Ukraine Council in its efforts to keep its headquarters, appealed to senior Government leaders, including President Yushchenko, who in December 2006 instructed the Ministry of Justice and Prosecutor General to make a determination on the case.

On April 11, 2007, President Yushchenko sent letters to the Prosecutor General, the acting SBU Chairman, and the Minister of Interior expressing his concern over a growing number of reports about desecration of monuments to the country's heroes and war victims, vandalism against Jewish burial sites, and an increase in the number and activity of youth extremist groups. He requested that officials take urgent measures to bring to justice those involved.

On March 21, 2007, the city of Yalta established a commission that recommended a mass grave site, containing mostly Holocaust victims, be given protected status after members of Jewish community raised concerns that the site could be used for commercial or residential development.

On February 26, 2007, Odesa's Presbyterian community won a court ruling on the local actors' guild effort to gain ownership of the recently renovated historical Presbyterian church building, and the actors' guild appeal of the verdict was overruled.

On several occasions, President Yushchenko made strong statements against ethnic and religious intolerance. On January 27, 2007, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, President Yushchenko spoke out strongly against manifestations of xenophobia and anti-Semitism. On September 27, 2006, President Yushchenko spoke out forcefully against anti-Semitism at the ceremony to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Babyn Yar Massacre in Kyiv, which was attended by senior Government officials, and foreign leaders.

According to the SCNR, in August 2006 the kenesa building in Yevpatoriya, Crimea was returned to the local Karaite community.

The SCNR, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Border Guard Committee, State Customs Service, State Committee for Tourism, and other agencies, cooperated to support Jewish pilgrimages to the burial site in Uman of Rabbi Nakhman Tsadyk, founder of the Bratslav Hasidic movement. According to the media, more than 20,000 Hasidim traveled to Uman in September 2006.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of problems with registration for minority and nontraditional religious groups. The Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine noted that the longstanding problem with registering a community in Kharkiv Oblast was resolved. The Progressive Jewish movement also noted that its registration problem in Dnipropetrovsk had been resolved.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

On December 19, 2006, a foreign Jehovah's Witnesses missionary in Kremenchuk, Poltavska Oblast, was severely beaten and hospitalized with serious brain injuries. There were previous acts of harassment and vandalism directed against foreign missionaries and members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kremenchuk. At the end of the period covered by this report, police had not begun an investigation.

On July 8 and again on August 12, 2006, anti-Tatar vigilantes, some of whom referred to themselves as Cossacks, used force against Crimean Tatars demanding the

removal of an open-air market from an ancient Muslim cemetery in Bakhchysarai. Riot police were brought to the area to stop the violence. The market was subsequently removed from the cemetery.

Leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses complained that on August 29, 2006, the Cherkassy Appeals Court upheld a lower court's decision to free a UOC–MP priest who attacked two members of Jehovah's Witnesses in 2005. They also complained that in September 2006 the Horlivka City Court sentenced a man to 12 months in prison for hooliganism instead of the more serious crime of inciting religious hatred for the 2005 attack on two members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

According to media reports, from January to mid-May 2007 the Interior Ministry registered 873 instances of desecration of burial sites around the country. There were also several instances in which churches and cemeteries were vandalized, particularly in Odesa Oblast and Crimea. On April 26, 2007, vandals painted antireligious symbols on a UOC–MP church and gravestones in Izmail, Odesa Oblast. Police investigated the incident but made no arrests. In April 2007 vandals broke 35 gravestones at a Muslim cemetery in the village of Sofiivka near Simferopol. Police investigated the incident but made no arrests. On April 16, the chairman of the Crimean Parliament, Anatoliy Hrytsenko, made a statement strongly condemning the desecration. On July 1, 2006, a statue of the Mother of God was vandalized in Lviv. The vandals were not identified.

The UOC–MP and UOC–KP were unable to resolve differences concerning the Holy Trinity Church in Rokhmaniv Village in Ternopil Oblast despite an August 31, 2006, ruling by the High Administrative Court overturning a 2005 resolution by the Ternopil Region State Administration that parishioners of the two groups should share the church. On June 22, 2007, while commenting on the events in Rokhmaniv, SCNR Chairman Popov stated that although the SCNR hoped to see an end to the practice of various denominations sharing a place of worship, the Government should not intrude in interdenominational disputes.

Mejlis members and Crimea-based human rights groups continued to criticize the Crimean government for permitting schools to use textbooks that contained inflammatory and historically inaccurate material about Tatar Muslims despite Government promises to address their concerns. Human rights activists specifically noted that a common textbook for fifth-grade students, Viktor Misan's *Stories on the History of Ukraine*, and A.K. Shchvidko's eighth-grade textbook, *History of Ukraine, 16–18th Centuries*, depicted Muslims in a negative light.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and religious leaders as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. A majority of foreign religious workers were American citizens, and the U.S. Embassy continued to intervene as necessary to defend their rights to due process under the law.

The U.S. Ambassador and other officials maintained an ongoing dialogue with Government and religious leaders and stayed in close contact with clerics and lay leaders in religious communities. The Embassy tracked developments in religious freedom and cultural heritage preservation court cases involving anti-Semitism, including the Sambir and Volodymyr-Volynsky Jewish cemetery cases, and followed closely the rise in anti-Semitic incidents in Dnipropetrovsk and cases involving discrimination against Tatars in Crimea. U.S. Government officials raised concerns about religious freedom and anti-Semitism with the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Office of the Prosecutor General, Office of the Prime Minister, and Presidential Secretariat. The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials, including the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, also raised concerns directly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Science and Education, and the country's Embassy in Washington about the anti-Semitic teachings and publications of MAUP.

Embassy officers tracked developments in religious freedom court cases involving different religious groups. For example, the Embassy wrote the mayor of Odesa asking the city to ensure that the Reformed Presbyterian Church receive due process in its court case with the local actors' guild to keep its recently renovated church. The Embassy wrote the mayor of Simferopol to encourage the city to support the local Jewish community's efforts to construct a new synagogue in the city. Embassy representatives met periodically with leaders of Baptist Union to obtain updates on the status of its legal struggle to keep its downtown Kyiv headquarters, which it won in May 2007.

Throughout the period covered by this report, the Ambassador raised the broader topics of communal property restitution and cultural heritage preservation in meetings and correspondence with Government officials at the highest levels, including

the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Justice Minister, and Transportation Minister. Embassy officials were in contact with Uman city officials and local Jewish leaders to track developments in the planned construction of a building in a residential area that could damage what remains of the city's historic Jewish cemetery. The Embassy wrote the mayor of Yalta regarding a mass grave site for Holocaust victims, encouraging the city to grant it protection against development.

Embassy officers continued to maintain close contact not only with clerics but also with lay leaders in religious communities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations, such as Caritas, the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, that were active in the country. In addition, the Ambassador facilitated similar meetings with these groups for members of Congress and other visiting U.S. officials.

The Ambassador met with the leaders of the four largest Christian denominations—the UOC–MP, UOC–KP, UGCC, and Baptist Union—to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country. The Ambassador also met with leaders of the Jewish and Islamic communities, and Embassy officers met with religious leaders in Kyiv and Crimea to better understand the concerns of those communities.

The Embassy released a statement to the press condemning the February 2007 desecration of the Jewish cemetery and monuments in Odesa. In November 2006 the Embassy sponsored a visit from the director of the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, California, to share experiences in promoting tolerance and trust in a multicultural society with various Ukrainian audiences in Simferopol and Kyiv.

Embassy representatives met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and law enforcement officials to express concern about the attack on a missionary and press for a thorough investigation of the incident.

The Embassy continued funding for a grant to Ukrainian Catholic University's Institute of Religion and Society to monitor religious freedom in the country and post the results on its Web site.

UNITED KINGDOM

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

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

There were some societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Violence declined in Northern Ireland. There was a significant increase in the number of reported cases of anti-Semitism, especially following the Israeli conflict with Hezbollah last summer. A notable increase in reports of "Islamophobic" behavior occurred, often following terrorist incidents or public discussion of aspects of the Muslim community's practice, such as the wearing of the veil.

On August 10, 2006, officials arrested 24 Muslim suspects involved in plotting terrorist attacks on passenger airplanes, who claimed they were carrying out the attacks based on their Islamic religious beliefs. The suspected 2006 plots have sparked considerable concern about how to insure religious tolerance and full integration of all religious communities, while ensuring the Government can thwart future attacks and combat the spread of violent extremism.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 94,525 square miles and a population of 60.2 million.

Christians make up 72 percent of the population, including the Church of England, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and many unaffiliated Christian groups. In 2003 the Office of National Statistics indicated approximately 29 percent of the population identified with Anglicanism, 10 percent with the Catholic Church, and 14 percent with Protestant churches. A September 2006 English-Church Census reported that Methodists were decreasing as a percentage of the population, and Pentecostals, many from Africa, were increasing.

Individuals with no religious belief comprise 15 percent of the population. Muslims comprise 3 percent of the population. The Muslim community is predominantly South Asian in origin. Groups comprising 1 percent or less of the population included Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. Individuals from Jewish, Hindu, Bud-

dhist, Muslim, and Sikh backgrounds were concentrated in London and other large urban areas, primarily in England.

Religious affiliation was not evenly distributed among ethnicities. According to 2001 census data, approximately 70 percent of the white population described themselves as Christians. Nearly 75 percent of black Caribbean respondents stated that they were Christians, as did 70 percent of black Africans. Meanwhile, 45 percent of Indians were Hindus, and 29 percent were Sikhs. Approximately 92 percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were Muslims.

In Northern Ireland, where divisions between nationalists and unionists have evolved largely along religious lines, the 2001 census showed that 53.1 percent were Protestants and 43.8 percent were Catholics. The policy of the Government remained one of promotion of religious tolerance.

Most Catholics and Protestants continued to live in segregated communities in Northern Ireland, although many middle class neighborhoods were mixed communities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The 1998 Human Rights Act guarantees freedom of religion and bans discrimination based on religion.

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act defines "religious hatred" as hatred against a group of persons which may be determined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief. The act does not define religion or what constitutes a religious belief but leaves that determination to the courts. Offenses under the act must be threatening and intended to stir up religious hatred based on the following criteria: The use of words, behavior, or display of written material; publishing or distributing written material; the public performance of a play; distributing, showing, or playing a recording; broadcasting or including a program in a program service; or the possession of written materials or recordings with a view to display, publication, distribution, or inclusion in a program service. The act does not apply where words or behavior are used or displayed inside a private dwelling and does not apply to criticism or dislike of a religious belief. The maximum penalty for stirring up religious hatred is 7 years in prison. This act gives only constables the power to arrest persons in the context of these offenses, rather than allowing "citizens' arrests."

The Equality Act makes it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of "religion or belief" or the "lack of religion or belief" in the provision of goods, facilities and services, education, the use and disposal of property, and the exercise of public functions. The Equality Act established the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR), which is responsible for promoting an awareness of the act's provisions, promoting equality and diversity, and working towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment. The CEHR has powers to investigate unlawful acts of discrimination and can bring legal proceedings against violators of the Equality Act's provisions. In Scotland, the CEHR's remit covers only human rights matters reserved for Westminster. Human rights for matters "devolved" to the Scottish Parliament are covered by the Scottish Commission for Human Rights. The Equality Act allows the CEHR to cover devolved matters if it has the agreement of the proposed Scottish Commission.

Religious discrimination in employment and vocational training is illegal under the 2003 Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations. The 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act covers "religiously aggravated offenses," based on existing assault, harassment, criminal damage, and public order offenses. Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" (where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime) face higher maximum penalties.

Under the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the 2003 Communications Act, religious bodies can hold local and national digital radio and digital terrestrial television licenses.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) reported an increase in prosecutions over the previous year for both racist and religiously motivated incidents. There were a total of 43 cases classified as religiously aggravated cases, of which the CPS prosecuted 41 defendants. Of the 22 cases in which the religion of the victim was known, 18 were Muslims, 3 were Christians, and 1 was a Sikh. The CPS brought a total of 58 charges against the defendants; 51 charges were adjudicated and the remaining 7 were dropped due to witnesses failing to appear, witnesses refusing to testify, or in the public interest.

There are two established (or state) churches: The Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). The Act of Settlement, enacted in 1688,

states that no Roman Catholic, or person married to a Roman Catholic, may ascend the throne. The monarch is the "Supreme Governor" of the Church of England, must always be a member, and promise to uphold the Church. The monarch's connection with the Church of England is the subject of ongoing public debate.

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 General Convention of 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.

Those who believe that their freedom of religion has been infringed upon have the right to appeal to the courts for relief. The Government includes other faiths in national events; for example, under the auspices of the Church of England, the Queen supported invitations to representatives of a broad range of faiths to participate in the national Remembrance Day Service. The Government made 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 the country's Muslims on pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland do not have "official" religions. The 1921 Church of Scotland Act reorganized the Church as Scotland's national church based on a Presbyterian system but not dependent on any Government body or the Queen for spiritual matters or leadership.

Immigration regulations require visa applicants who wish to enter the country as ministers of religion to obtain level four competence in spoken English on the International English Language Testing System. Visa adjudicators are permitted to waive the testing requirement at their discretion and where other evidence of English competency is provided for applicants educated in an English-speaking country. Ministers of religion are also required to have worked for at least 1 year in the last 5 as a minister. Ministers of religion applying for visas must also have 1 year of full-time experience or 2 years of part-time training following their ordination for faiths where ordination is the sole means of entering the ministry. To obtain an entry visa a missionary must be trained as such or have worked previously as a missionary.

While not usually enforced and essentially a legal anachronism, blasphemy against Anglican doctrine remains technically illegal in England and Wales.

Holy days that are considered national holidays include Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. No church or religious organization—established or otherwise—receives direct funding from the state. The Government provides financial support—up to 90 percent of the total capital costs of the buildings and 100 percent of running costs, including teachers' salaries—to sectarian educational institutions that are commonly referred to as "faith schools" (see the Societal section).

The Government also helps to fund repair and maintenance of all listed places of worship for religious groups nationwide and contributes to the budget of the Church Conservation Trust, which preserves "redundant" Church of England buildings of architectural or historic significance.

Most religious institutions are classified as charities, as the advancement of religion is considered to be a charitable purpose. 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 has not classified the Church of Scientology as a religious institution and therefore has not granted the organization recognition for charitable status.

As of the end of the reporting period, over 30 percent of state schools in England had a religious character. Nearly all of the 6,848 "faith schools" are associated with Christian denominations; there are 37 Jewish, 8 Muslim, and 2 Sikh schools. An additional two Jewish, three Muslim and two Sikh schools have also been tentatively approved by the Government to open. On October 26, 2006, Education Secretary Alan Johnson announced an agreement with the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England in which their "faith schools" would voluntarily accept up to 25 percent of places for pupils from another faith or no religious faith. In 2005 Chief Inspector of Schools for England David Bell and then-Schools Minister for England Stephen Twig, urged tolerance, inclusiveness, and collaboration in "faith schools."

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support. More than 90 percent of students attended schools that were either predominantly Catholic or Protestant. Integrated schools served approximately 5 percent of school-age children whose families voluntarily chose 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 outweighed the limited number of places available. On May 8, 2007, devolution, or granting of power, was restored, beating the May 10, 2007, deadline of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2007 amended legislation, thereby authorizing the Northern Ireland Assembly to decide on academic selection.

The law requires religious education for all children, aged 3 to 19, in publicly maintained schools. In England and Wales it forms part of the core curriculum in accordance with the Education Reform Act of 1988. In Scotland, religious education of some sort is mandated by the Education Act of 1980. However, the shape and content of religious instruction throughout the country is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed syllabi are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity while taking into account the teachings and practices of other principal religions in the country. Syllabi must be nondenominational and refrain from attempting to convert pupils. Schools with a religious designation follow a syllabus drawn up by the school governors according to the trust deed of the school.

Daily collective prayer or worship of a de facto Christian nature is practiced in schools in England and Wales, a requirement that may be waived for students who obtain permission of the school authorities; a waiver may also be granted if parents wish to remove a child from religion classes. Non-Christian worship is permitted with approval of the authorities.

On March 19, 2007, the Department of Education provided guidance that permits schools to prohibit full-face veils in school, further stating that schools "should act reasonably in accommodating religious requirements," under human rights legislation. But it is also legally possible under the act to have a school uniform policy that "restricts the freedom of pupils to manifest their religion" on the grounds of health and safety and the "protection of the rights and freedoms of others." The Government's guidance is meant to remind head-teachers to act with a degree of sensitivity when considering decisions that will impact the cultural complexion of their communities.

In Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment Act bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. A broad network of laws, regulations, and oversight bodies work to ensure that there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious faiths. All public sector employers and all private firms with more than 10 employees must report annually to the Equality Commission on the religious composition of their workforces and must review their employment practices every 3 years. Noncompliance may result in criminal penalties and the loss of Government contracts. Victims of employment discrimination may sue for damages. In addition, the 1998 Northern Ireland Act stipulates that all public authorities must show due regard for 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.

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations prohibit employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a "genuine occupational requirement" of a religious nature. The regulations do not apply in Northern Ireland.

It is Government policy to ensure that public servants are not discriminated against on the basis of religion and 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 military personnel who are adherents of minority religions with chaplains of their faith.

The Race, Cohesion and Faiths Directorate formed in May 2006 is responsible for tackling racism, extremism, and hate, and for promoting interfaith activity in England and Wales. According to this directorate, the Government asserts the right to exclude individuals, such as international religious leaders of minority religious groups, from the country on the grounds that their presence is not conducive to the public good, even where the public expression of religious or other beliefs by that individual is part of the reason for exclusion. The term "public good" is not defined in this context by the Government.

As a result of terrorist bombings in 2005, the Home Office launched a "Preventing Extremism Together" project and joint "task forces" with the Muslim community. Reports on the usefulness of these efforts were mixed. One part of the effort was the "theological road show," a series of seminars given by prominent Muslims advocating moderate, nonviolent interpretations of Islam. Though elements of the Government's action were praised, including more than 50 proposals dealing with edu-

cation, the role of women, mosques, and extremism, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was disappointed that few of the proposals developed by the "task forces" were pursued or enacted.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Various studies and surveys across the country found that many schools did not meet the intent and requirements of the collective worship directive. Parents and students in favor of the law say that it helps students understand the religious orientation of the country and the society in which they are living. There are some students and parents opposed to the policy and some teachers' organizations take exception to the requirement for collective worship and have asked the Government to review the current policy.

In reaction to the March 19, 2007, Department of Education guidance on full-face veils in school, some Muslim groups, including the Islamic Human Rights Commission, said it was inappropriate for the Government to provide guidance that regulated Muslim communities in matters concerning the expression of their faith.

In reaction to the terrorist attacks, the Government has sought to engage with "task forces" (see the Legal/Policy Framework section) and with other Muslim associations. However, prominent Muslims point out that the country's Muslim community is extremely diverse and that no one leader or group speaks for them all.

On June 22, 2007, the High Court heard the case of a 16-year-old Christian girl, Lydia Playfoot, who brought legal action against her school after it banned her from wearing a chastity ring which she claimed was an important symbol of her Christian faith. The student argued that because the school allowed Muslim and Sikh pupils to wear headscarves, trousers, and Kara bracelets, the ban on her ring breached her human rights. The school banned the ring, engraved with a Biblical verse, because it was considered to be jewelry. The school also forbade the wearing of crosses and crucifixes on the grounds that they were jewelry and wearing them was not an intrinsic component of the Christian faith. School officials punished Lydia and other students by isolating them from their classmates or by putting them in detention halls. Many observers speculated in the press that the school's actions were Christianophobic or exhibited prejudice toward evangelical Christians. Croydon council explained that "it is not compulsory to wear a cross . . . it is a personal preference and can be taken off," whereas although the taweez (written verses from the Qur'an) was "not a compulsory item in all branches of Islam, some branches feel that it is, which is why it appears in the guidance." At the end of the reporting period a review of dress code policies presented to the education committee was not complete.

On March 22, 2006, the Law Lords, the national court of last resort, ruled in favor of a high school in Buckinghamshire that expelled a Muslim teenager for contravening its dress code. In 2002 the school expelled Shabina Begum for wearing a jilbab, a traditional dress that leaves only the face and hands exposed, which violated the school's dress code. After her expulsion, Begum filed suit in the High Court, which ruled in the school's favor. In 2005 the Court of Appeal overturned this decision. The House of Lords unanimously reversed the Court of Appeal ruling upholding the High Court's decision. Begum decided not to take her case to the European Court of Human Rights.

Members of the Muslim community complained that police targeted them for suspicion, arrest, and "stop-and-search" disproportionately more than any other group, under powers granted by anti-terrorism laws. Several studies have shown that Muslims suffer serious discrimination from both authorities and societal actors.

On October 19, 2006, an employment tribunal ruled that the October 13, 2006, firing of Muslim teaching assistant Aishah Azmi for wearing a niqab was not discriminatory either directly or indirectly. The school had monitored her performance before concluding that the niqab (full face veil) was affecting some pupils' ability to understand her. The tribunal awarded Azmi $2,145 (1,100 British Pounds Sterling) for "hurt feelings" because the Kirklees Council, where Azmi's school was located, failed to follow grievance procedures correctly. On October 17, 2006, then-Prime Minister Tony Blair said he could understand why Azmi was fired, but he affirmed Muslim women's right to cover their heads/faces in public, while noting that the veil sets up a separation that raises valid concerns about integration. Mr. Blair's comments closely followed the October 6, 2006, comments of the former Foreign Secretary and then-leader of the House of Commons Jack Straw who stated publicly that he preferred that Muslim women not wear a niqab in his office as it makes social relations more difficult.

Citing a limited broadcast spectrum, the Government continued to prohibit religious groups from holding a national sound broadcasting license, a public teletext

license, an additional television service license, and radio and television multiplex licenses.

According to a 1999 decision of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, a quasi-judicial, independent body established by law as the regulator and registrar for charities, the Church of Scientology does not fall within the charity law definition of a religion. The Church of Scientology has not exercised its right of appeal. As a result, Scientology chapels do not qualify as places of worship and Scientology ministers are not considered ministers of religion, which affects their legal rights regarding visas and immigration. The Prison Service does not recognize Scientology as a religion for the purpose of facilitating prison visits by ministers, although prisoners who are registered as Scientologists may practice their religion and have access to a representative of the Church of Scientology if they wish to receive its ministry. Ministers of the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church of Reverend Moon are not issued visas as ministers since their organizations are not accepted as religions. Adherents and those wishing to learn about either group may apply for visas as visitors or students, respectively.

Roman Catholic religious and political leaders urged repeal of the Act of Settlement, which does not allow the monarch and spouse to be Catholic. A 2001 Home Office study suggested that the establishment status of the Church of England causes "religious disadvantage" to other religious communities and while some Anglican bishops' are included in the House of Lords, membership in a given religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents, beyond this instance.

In relation to their percentage of the Northern Ireland population (44 percent), Catholics were underrepresented in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), currently comprising 20 percent. Since 1999 ongoing Government-mandated measures to increase Catholic representation in the PSNI have increased this proportion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

For calendar year 2006, the Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 594 anti-Semitic incidents in the country, a 31 percent increase from 2005. A majority of the incidents coincided with the fighting in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah in July and August. CST recorded 112 violent assaults, 365 instances of abusive behavior, 70 incidents of damage and desecration to Jewish property, and 82 incidents targeting synagogues, including 27 involving damage to synagogue buildings. A further 50 incidents targeted congregants on their way to or from prayer. There were 59 incidents targeting Jewish schools or schoolchildren, and a further 9 desecrations of Jewish cemeteries. There was an anonymous report of attackers stabbing an identifiably Jewish man on the street in London, but no more information was released.

On September 7, 2006, the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry concluded that anti-Semitism was on the rise and noted that the Jewish community "has had to provide security guards for synagogues, Jewish schools, buildings and events . . . costing the community millions of pounds annually." The report also noted that police forces usually do not record anti-Semitic incidents as such and expressed concern that only 1 in 10 incidents reported to the police resulted in any proceedings against the perpetrator.

The report also noted concern over anti-Semitism on university campuses. A lecturer at a public London university told a Jewish student who sought to explain his absence on religious festivals that he should choose between his religion or his degree. University officials told another Jewish student that since the university is a secular institution it does not need to take account of a student's religion and that since she refused to take exams on the Jewish Sabbath, the university would seriously debate enrolling anyone with a Jewish name in the future.

In addition the report condemned the call for boycotts by the two national teachers' groups of all Israeli academics and of Israel's Haifa and Bar Ilan universities in May 2006 and in 2005. The report noted that the debate contained anti-Semitic demonizing of Israel, such as Nazi analogies and suggestions that Israel was "a Fascist state," described a Jewish group as a Zionist operation, and asserted that "campus Jews" who turned out to block the boycott were not "proper trade unionists."

On October 19, 2006, the high court upheld an appeal by the Mayor of London to overturn a month-long suspension he received when he likened a Jewish reporter to a Nazi concentration camp guard. The Court noted that the Mayor should have

apologized and realized his comments not only offended the journalist but were "likely to be regarded as entirely inappropriate observations by Jews in general. . . ." The Anti-Defamation League and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) noted that the Mayor had a history of making anti-Semitic remarks.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 8, 2007, the establishment of a power-sharing Government brought Northern Ireland new hope for the end of centuries-old sectarian divisions between the Protestant and Catholic communities. Democratic Unionist Party leader Ian Paisley was sworn in as the Northern Ireland Assembly First Minister while Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness took the oath of office as Deputy First Minister.

The Scottish Executive undertook significant steps to address religious intolerance and bigotry. In 2006 the Executive provided approximately $187,000 (100,000 pounds sterling) to support antisectarian projects in schools; $18,700 (10,000 pounds sterling) to support an antisectarian campaign run by the National Union of Students; and $25,245 (13,500 pounds sterling) to support antisectarian resources in youth work. It also added an antisectarian award for the Scottish Education Awards.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There was a significant increase in anti-Semitic incidents. (See Anti-Semitism section.)

Violence declined in Northern Ireland. There was little intimidation by paramilitary gangs, and while bigotry and violence continued, levels decreased significantly. During 2006–07, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) found 1,695 sectarian incidents and 136 faith/religion motivated incidents (nearly doubling the number from last year). However, the "marching season"—two large parades in July and August during which violent rioting has often taken place—occurred without incident in 2006 and was the most peaceful parading season in many decades. Negotiations involving parade organizers, leaders in nationalist and loyalist areas, NGOs, and Government and police officials helped ensure public order relating to other parades.

There were reports of "Islamophobic" behavior, often following terrorist incidents or public discussion of aspects of the Muslim community's practice, such as the wearing of the veil. During the second half of 2006, there was a notable increase in anti-Muslim incidents in the form of verbal and physical assaults, vandalism, arson, anti-Muslim literature, and Internet postings. This rise in societal abuses and discrimination followed the August 10, 2006, arrest of 24 UK-born Muslims allegedly plotting an air terrorist attack against airplanes between the U.S. and the UK, and also coincided with the July–August 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Hindus and Sikhs, misidentified as Muslims, were also targets of such incidents. Government and religious leaders of all faiths cautioned the public not to engage in such hate crimes and reiterated that the majority of the country's Muslims were peaceful and law-abiding citizens.

On October 23, 2006, someone shot at a Muslim family, including a woman wearing a niqab, in their car, but no one was injured. A few days earlier on October 21, a man attacked an imam and three worshippers inside a mosque in Manchester; one worshiper was briefly hospitalized. Police arrested two men on suspicion of racial assault. The mosque stated that a week earlier, vandals smashed the windows of 20 cars belonging to worshippers. Police stepped up their patrols in the area and called for calm as the end of Ramadan approached.

On October 14, 2006, the country's Muslim NGOs accused organizers of the London 2012 Olympic games of prejudice because the games are scheduled during Ramadan, which falls in July and August that year, while Muslim athletes will be fasting. Also on October 14, 2006, a man attacked a Glasgow imam in his mosque; police believe the attack was racially motivated. On October 7, 2006, an assailant tore a woman's veil from her face in Liverpool.

On August 13, 2006, an arsonist set fire to the Al-Birr mosque in Basingstoke.

On February 3, 2006, a court acquitted the leader of the British National Party (BNP) and a party activist of several charges of incitement to racial hatred. However, the Crown Prosecution Services announced they would proceed with retrials of other charges of incitement to racial hatred against both men resulting from hung juries. Their arrests followed a 2005 BBC broadcast, in which the BNP leader was covertly recorded calling Islam a "vicious, wicked faith." On November 10, 2006, in

a retrial at Leeds Crown Court, the court cleared the BNP of the charges for inciting racial hatred by the unanimous decision of a 12-person jury.

On January 22, 2007, after a review of company dress code policy and following considerable public pressure British Airline (BA) officials announced the reversal of the company's previous policy and decided employees could wear visible religious symbols, including crosses. Public pressure came from the Government, including over 100 members of Parliament and the Prime Minister, as well as from various Christian organizations and church leaders. On October 16, 2006, the media reported that BA refused to allow a female employee to openly wear a small Christian cross necklace, while permitting Sikh and Muslim employees to wear turbans and veils. BA uniform dress code policy was that employees could not wear visible jewelry or other "adornments" while on duty without permission from BA management.

On December 20, 2006, the country's press reported a second airline, bmi [*sic*], imposed restrictive religious rules on a flight attendant who wished to carry a Bible with her on her flights to Saudi Arabia. The airline was reported to have offered her shorter routes to other places where she could take a Bible but would not change its rules for flights to Saudi Arabia. At the end of the reporting period, the attendant was taking bmi [*sic*] to the employment tribunal.

A June 30, 2006, Government report addressed abuse by African evangelical churches of African children branded as witches, following a series of widely publicized incidents involving the death and abuse of young African children over the past 6 years. The report described "exorcism," consisting of severe beatings and other premeditated cruelties such as starving, burning, and isolating the child. The perpetrators are usually caretakers, often not the natural parents, and the abuse usually occurs in the household where the child lives. The common features of the cases are a child scapegoat, an incomplete family structure, and disability. The report suggests that by recognizing these patterns it may be possible to identify children at risk early and prevent cases from escalating. The report recommended gathering better information about cases, drawing up guidance about handling cases, monitoring the movement of children, and protecting children in places of worship. The African evangelical community is divided in its views about the benefits and risks of such exorcisms and is working with NGOs and Government social services to develop child protection guidelines.

Government funding of "faith schools," institutions funded by the state but administratively controlled by religious organizations, has become an increasingly sensitive subject within the country. One group, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), has been particularly critical of Government policies on funding "faith schools." The ATL argues that the role of religion in society has declined, the population has become more secular, and that "faith schools" tend to marginalize their students from society and have a polarizing effect instead of acting as tools to promote integration and social cohesion.

The Council of Christians and Jews worked to advance better relations between the two religions and to combat anti-Semitism. The Interfaith Network linked 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 had a consultative relationship with the Home Office, from which it received financial support. The Inner Cities Religious Council encouraged interfaith activity through regional conferences and support for local initiatives. The NGO Respect continued to encourage voluntary time-sharing and mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

The Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland served as the main forum for ecumenical Christian cooperation. For example, Anglican parishes shared their churches 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 attended regular meetings of the Three Faiths Forum, an interfaith dialogue organization. Embassy and consulate officers were in regular contact with religious leaders of various faiths to discuss religious freedom issues. Embassy officials were actively engaged in "outreach" presentations to the public, with a particular focus on Muslim communities. Embassy officers discussed the need for religious tolerance, especially towards immigrants from the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America.

In Northern Ireland, long-standing issues related to national identity have been part of political and economic friction between Protestant and Catholic communities. As an active supporter of the peace process, the U.S. Government encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialogue between these two communities.

NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and prohibits institutions from engaging in behavior incompatible with Islamic morality. The Constitution does not provide explicitly for religious freedom; however, it provides that the people set up institutions whose aims include the protection of fundamental liberties of the citizen. Ordinance 06–03, which delimits the conditions and rules concerning the exercise of religious rites for non-Muslims, provides for the freedom to practice religious rites, on condition that the exercise thereof is in keeping with the ordinance, the Constitution, other laws and regulations, and that public order, morality, and the rights and basic freedoms of others are respected. The law limits the practice of faiths other than Islam, including prohibiting public assembly for the purpose of their practice. However, the Government allows registered non-Muslim religious groups, in limited instances, to conduct public religious services in preapproved locations. Religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law) are prohibited.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. In 2006 the Government confined non-Muslim worship to specific buildings approved by the state, increased requirements for the registration of religious organizations; increased punishments for anyone who proselytizes Muslims; and made regulations on the importation of non-Islamic religious texts more stringent through the adoption of Ordinance 06–03. Since it took effect in September 2006, there have been no reports of its enforcement. In May and June, 2007, the Government issued executive decrees providing greater specificity to Articles Eight and Nine of the Ordinance, and which functioned as implementing legislation.

Differences within the Muslim majority about the interpretation and practice of Islam caused some discord among religious groups. Islamist terrorists continued to justify their killing of security force members and civilians by referring to interpretations of religious texts. Terrorist violence based on religious extremism increased after the terrorist organization Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) was recognized by al-Qaeda in September 2006 and changed its name in February 2007 to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Differences that remain within the country's Muslim majority about the interpretation and practice of Islam caused some discord among religious groups.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 919,595 square miles and a population of 33 million. More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. There is a small community of Ibadi Muslims in Ghardaia. Official data on the number of non-Muslim citizens is not available; however, practitioners reported it to be less than 5,000. The vast majority of Christians and Jews fled the country following independence from France in 1962. Many of those who remained emigrated in the 1990s due to violent acts of terrorism committed by Islamic extremists. According to Christian community leaders, Methodists and members of other Protestant denominations account for the largest numbers of non-Muslims, followed by Roman Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists. There are 3,000 members of evangelical churches (mostly in the Kabylie region) and 300 Catholics. A significant proportion of the country's Christian alien residents are students and illegal immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa seeking to reach Europe; their numbers are difficult to estimate.

For security reasons, due mainly to the civil conflict, Christians concentrated in the large cities of Algiers, Annaba, and Oran in the mid-1990s. During the period

covered by this report, evangelical proselytizing led to increases in 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, reportedly increased in the region. Reporting suggests that citizens themselves, not foreigners, make up the majority of those actively proselytizing in Kabylie.

One missionary group operated in the country on a full-time basis. Other evangelistic groups visited the country but are not established. While most Christians did not proselytize actively, they reported that conversions took place.

There was no active Jewish community, although a very small number of Jews continue to live in Algiers. Since 1994 the size of the Jewish community has diminished to virtual nonexistence due to fears of terrorist violence, and the synagogue in Algiers remained closed.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and prohibits institutions from engaging in behavior incompatible with Islamic morality. The Constitution does not provide explicitly for religious freedom; however, it provides that the people set up institutions whose aims include the protection of fundamental liberties of the citizen. The Constitution prohibits non-Muslims from running for the presidency. Ordinance 06–03 of 2006, which delimits the conditions and rules concerning the practice of religious rites for non-Muslims, provides for the freedom to practice religious rites, on condition that the exercise thereof is in keeping with the ordinance, the Constitution, other laws and regulations, and that public order, morality, and the rights and basic freedoms of others are respected. The law limits the practice of faiths other than Islam, including by prohibiting public assembly for the purpose of their practice, requiring organized religious groups to register with the Government, and controlling the importation of Christian religious materials. However, the Government allows registered non-Muslim religious groups, in limited instances, to conduct public religious services.

In 2006 the Government increased requirements for religious organizations to register, increased punishments for individuals who proselytize Muslims, and made regulations on the importation of religious texts more stringent through passage of Ordinance 06–03. During the reporting period, there were no reports of enforcement of the law's sections covering proselytizing. No foreign visitors are known to have been implicated in, arrested, or imprisoned for proselytism since the ordinance was put into effect in September 2006.

Ordinance 06–03 also confines non-Muslim worship to specific buildings approved by the state and announced the creation of a national commission to regulate the registration process. In May 2007 the Government issued Executive Decree 07–135, which gave greater precision to Article 8 of the Ordinance, specifying the manner and conditions under which religious services of non-Muslims may take place. The decree specifies that a request for permission to observe non-Muslim religious rites has to be submitted to the wali (governor equivalent) at least 5 days before the event and take place in buildings accessible to the public. Included in a request should be information on three principal organizers of the event, its purpose, the number of attendees anticipated, a schedule of events, and its planned location. A permit indicating this information must also be obtained by the organizers and presented to authorities upon request. Under the decree, the wali can request the organizers move the place of observance or can disapprove an event completely if it is deemed a danger to public order.

In June 2007 the Government issued Executive Decree 07–158, which gives greater precision to Article 9 of the Ordinance, specifying the composition of the National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Services and conditions pursuant to its functioning. It establishes that the Commission is to be presided over by the Minister of Religious Affairs and Awqaf (Religious Endowments), and composed of senior representatives of the Ministers of National Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, and National Security, the National Police Headquarters, and the quasi-governmental National Consultative Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (CNCPPDH). Individuals and groups who believe they are not being treated fairly by the Ministry of Religious Affairs may voice their concerns to the CNCPPDH.

The Government recognizes the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Awal Moharem, Ashura, and the birth of the Prophet Muhammad as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Articles 5 through 11 of Ordinance 06–03 outline enforceable restrictions which stipulate that all structures intended for the exercise of religious worship must be registered by the state, any modification of a structure to allow religious worship is subject to prior Government approval, and worship may only take place in structures exclusively intended and approved for that purpose. Additionally, proselytizing is made a criminal offense, and the punishment for it is established at 1 to 3 years in jail and a maximum fine of $7,100 (500,000 dinars) for lay individuals and 3 to 5 years of jail time and a maximum of $14,285 (1 million dinars) for religious leaders. The law lays out a maximum of 5 years in jail and a $7,100 (500,000 dinars) fine for anyone who "incites, constrains, or utilizes means of seduction tending to convert a Muslim to another religion; or by using to this end establishments of teaching, education, health, social, culture, training . . . or any financial means." Anyone who makes, stores, or distributes printed documents, audiovisual materials, or the like with the intent of "shaking the faith" of a Muslim may also be punished in this manner.

In theory, Ordinance 06–03 gives the Government the power to regulate the locations of all non-Muslim worship and monitor participation. Effectively, it enables the Government to shut down informal Christian religious services that take place in private homes or in secluded outdoor settings. Government officials assert that the law is designed to apply to non-Muslims the same constraints as those imposed on Muslims. Imams are hired and trained by the state and observances of Muslim services, with the exception of daily prayers, can only be performed in state-sanctioned mosques. The Government argues that the new requirement that non-Muslim religious services be conducted only in registered facilities puts the treatment of all religions on an equal basis before the law. Although Ordinance 06–03 marked a step backward for religious freedom, there were no reported instances of the law's implementation during the reporting period.

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. The Ministry's Educational Commission is composed of 28 members who are in charge of developing the educational system for teaching the Qur'an. The commission is responsible for setting rules for hiring teachers for the Qur'anic schools and madrassahs, and ensuring that all imams are of the highest educational caliber and teach in line with Government guidelines aimed at stemming Islamist extremism.

The Government appoints imams to mosques and, by law, is allowed to provide general guidance on sermon topics. In theory the Government also can prescreen and approve sermons before they are delivered publicly during Friday prayers. In practice each wilaya (state) and daira (county) employs religious officials to review sermon content, generally after the sermons are delivered. All persons, including imams recognized by the Government, are prohibited from speaking during prayers at the mosque in a manner that is "contrary to the noble nature of the mosque or likely to offend the cohesion of society or serve as an apology for such actions." If an imam's sermon is judged to be inappropriate, he can be convoked to a "Scientific Council" composed of Islamic law scholars and other imams who assess the appropriateness of the sermon. An imam can be relieved from duty if convoked multiple times. The Government's right of review has not been exercised with non-Islamic religious groups. The Government also monitors activities in mosques for possible security-related offenses and bars the use of mosques as public meeting places outside of regular prayer hours.

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, who acts "against the noble nature of the mosque" or acts in a manner "likely to offend public cohesion." The amendments do not specify what actions would constitute such acts.

The Government requires established religious groups to obtain official recognition prior to conducting any religious activity. The Protestant, Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist churches are the only non-Islamic religious groups authorized to operate in the country. Members of other churches are forced to operate without Government permission and secretly practice their faith in their homes, or like Methodists and Presbyterians, register as a part of the Protestant Church of Algeria. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for determining punishments for unrecognized religious associations found to be meeting without permission.

The law prohibits public assembly for purposes of practicing a faith other than Islam. Catholic churches, however, including a cathedral in Algiers (the seat of the

archbishop), conduct services without Government interference, as does a Protestant and an Anglican church. Non-Muslim services are primarily attended by members of the diplomatic community, expatriate Western business persons, sub-Saharan African migrants, and a few national Christians. The majority of Christians generally congregate in private homes for religious services.

Conversions from Islam to other religions are rare. 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. Christians report that conversions to Christianity take place.

The proselytizing of Muslims is illegal. Missionary groups are permitted to conduct humanitarian activities without Government interference as long as they are discreet and do not proselytize.

The Ministries of Religious Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Commerce all must approve the importation of non-Islamic religious writings. Often, delays of 5 to 6 months occur before obtaining such approval, and there have been further delays once books reach customs. Arabic and Tamazight (Berber) translations of non-Islamic texts are increasingly available, but the Government periodically has enforced restrictions on their importation. Religious leaders of the non-Muslim community expressed concern that Government delays of the importation of religious materials were impediments to practicing their faith. Individuals may bring personal copies of non-Islamic texts, such as the Bible, into the country. Non-Islamic religious texts, music, and video cassettes are available, and there are two stores in the capital that sell Bibles in several languages. Government-owned radio stations continued their practice of broadcasting Protestant Christmas and Easter services in French. 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 to wear the full veil (niqab). The Constitution prohibits non-Muslims from running for the presidency. Non-Muslims may hold other public offices and work within the Government; however, it is reported that they experience difficulties in advancing through the hierarchy.

The Ministries of Education and Religious Affairs strictly require, regulate, and fund the study of Islam in public schools. Private religious primary and secondary schools operate in the country; however, in 2006 the Government did not extend recognition to these institutions pending a review of their educational programs as required by the Ministry of National Education since 2005. Consequently, private school students had to register as independent students within the public school system to take national baccalaureate examinations. In 2006 the Government accorded official authorization to only 22 of 200 private schools. This measure was widely directed toward ensuring that schools supported by Saudi Arabia conformed to Government standards of religious teaching.

Some aspects of the law and many traditional social practices discriminate against women. The Family Code, adopted in 1984 and amended in 2005, is based in large part on Shari'a and treats women as minors under the legal guardianship of a husband or male relative. Under the code, Muslim women are prevented from marrying non-Muslims, although this regulation is not always enforced. The code does not prohibit Muslim men from marrying non-Muslim women, but it prohibits them from marrying a woman of a nonmonotheistic faith. Under both Shari'a and civil law, children born to a Muslim father are Muslim, regardless of the mother's religion. In rulings on divorce, custody of the children normally is awarded to the mother, but she may not enroll them in a particular school or take them out of the country without the father's authorization. Under the 2005 Family Code amendments, women no longer need the consent of a male guardian (tuteur) to marry. The code requires only that a chaperone (wali) of her choosing be present at the wedding. This change signaled a major step for women, as the role of a tuteur—usually a woman's father or other male relative—is to conclude the marriage on the woman's behalf, while a wali acts as a protector who is present while the woman concludes the marriage herself.

The Family Code also affirms the Islamic practice of allowing a man to marry up to four wives; however, he must obtain the consent of the current spouse, the intended new spouse, and a judge. Furthermore, a woman has the right to a no-polygamy clause in the prenuptial agreement. Polygamy rarely occurs in practice, accounting for only 1 percent of marriages.

Women also suffer from discrimination in inheritance claims. In accordance with Shari'a, women are entitled to a smaller portion of a deceased husband's estate than his male children or brothers. Non-Muslim religious minorities may suffer in inher-

itance 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 have earned. Females under 18 years of age may not travel abroad without the permission of a legal male guardian.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism in state-owned publications and broadcasts was rare; however, anti-Semitic articles appeared occasionally in the independent press, especially Arabic-language newspapers with an Islamic outlook. More frequent were articles criticizing policies of the Israeli Government and leadership. One newspaper, *El Fadjr*, published throughout the reporting period a number of anti-Semitic political cartoons that featured close U.S.-Israeli ties. There is no hate crime legislation.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

The country's decade-long civil conflict pitted Islamist terrorists belonging to the Armed Islamic Group and its offshoot, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), against the Government. While estimates vary, approximately 100,000 to 150,000 civilians, terrorists, and security forces have been killed during the past 15 years. Islamist extremists have issued public threats against all "infidels" in the country, both foreigners and citizens, and have killed both Muslims and non-Muslims. During the reporting period, terrorist violence based on religious extremism increased after the GSPC was recognized by al-Qaeda in September 2006 and changed its name in February 2007 to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). As a rule the majority of the country's terrorist groups do not differentiate between religious and political killings.

The Government takes its commitment to protecting non-Muslims seriously. In April 2007 security forces visited the home and religious center of a group of Christian clergy that were living, and legally operating, in the Kabylie region east of Algiers to recommend they evacuate to Algiers. In the wake of the April 11, 2007 bombing of the building housing the Prime Minister's office, the security forces had learned of a possible threat against the clergy and their center, which prompted their recommendation of a temporary evacuation. The clergy reported that they did not believe this action constituted a form of harassment. In their view, the security forces showed legitimate concern for their safety in the face of potential Islamic fundamental violence being directed towards them.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Differences that remain within the country's Muslim majority about the interpretation and practice of Islam caused some discord among religious groups. 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, and experience minimal societal discrimination.

In general society tolerates foreigners who practice faiths other than Islam; however, citizens who renounce Islam generally are ostracized by their families and shunned by their neighbors. The Government does not usually become involved in such disputes.

Most cases of harassment and security threats against non-Muslims are committed by radical Islamists who are determined to rid the country of those who do not share their extremist interpretation of Islam. Moderate Muslim religious and political leaders publicly criticized acts of violence committed in the name of Islam such as the April 11, 2007 simultaneous bombings of the Prime Minster's office in downtown Algiers and 2 police stations that killed 33 persons and injured hundreds. Despite a law banning public demonstrations, the Government permitted, and Government employees attended in large numbers, an antiterrorism rally in the days following the attack.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government actively promotes 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 of the Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials met with the Ministry for Religious Affairs. The Ambassador also met with members of the High Islamic Council and several national scholars of Islamic studies throughout the reporting period. Additionally, Embassy officials attended seminars on religious tolerance and concepts of Islam particular to the country, often sponsored by the Government and national religious organizations.

The Embassy underscored the need for religious tolerance by funding two ongoing cultural restoration projects with religious significance for both Christians and Muslims. Embassy officials promoted religious freedom in speeches to university students by describing the high level of tolerance that all faiths, including Islam, enjoy in the United States. Additionally, the Embassy sponsored an International Visitor Program for five national religious leaders to discuss religious tolerance in the United States. The Embassy maintained contact with three Islamic political parties (Movement for a Peaceful Society, Movement for National Reform, and former members of the defunct group Ennahda).

The Embassy maintained frequent contact with the National Consultative Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights.

BAHRAIN

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is a principal source for legislation. Article 22 of the Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, the inviolability of worship, and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings, in accordance with the customs observed in the country; however, the Government placed some limitations on the exercise of this right.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. The Government continued to exert a level of control and to monitor both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, and there continued to be Government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims in certain fields. Members of other religious groups who practice their faith privately do so without interference from the Government.

There were occasional reports of incidents between the Government and elements of the Shi'a majority population, who were often critical of the Sunni-controlled Government's rule. Problems continued to exist, stemming primarily from the Government's perceived unequal treatment of Shi'a in the country.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 231 square miles and a population of 725,000. The citizen population is 99 percent Muslim; Jews and Christians constitute the remaining 1 percent. Muslims belong to the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam, with Shi'a constituting an estimated 70 percent of the Muslim population.

Foreigners, mostly from South Asia and other Arab countries, constitute an estimated 38 percent of the population. Approximately half of resident foreigners are non-Muslim, including Christians (primarily Catholic, Protestant, Syrian Orthodox, and Mar Thoma from South India), Hindus, Bahá'ís, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion of the country and also provides for freedom of religion; however, there were limits on this right. The Government allows religion-based, political nongovernmental organizations to register as political "societies," which operate somewhat like parties with the legal authority to conduct political activities. Parliamentary and municipal elections were held in 2006 and all political societies participated, including the largest Shi'a political society, which had boycotted the last parliamentary elections in 2002. Of eligible voters, 73 percent participated in the elections.

Every religious group must obtain a license from the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs (MOJIA) to operate. In December 2006 the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Islamic Affairs merged to form the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs. Depending on circumstances, for example, the opening of a religious school, a religious group may also need approval from the Ministry of Social Development,

the Ministry of Information, and/or the Ministry of Education. Christian congregations that are registered with the Ministry of Social Development operated freely and were allowed to offer their facilities to other Christian congregations that did not have their places of worship.

The Government prohibits anti-Islamic writings.

Four Sikh temples and several Hindu temples are allowed to function freely. The country's only synagogue has not been operational for nearly 60 years.

Holding a religious meeting without a permit is illegal; however, there were no reports of religious groups being denied a permit to gather. Unregistered Christian congregations exist, and there were no reports of the Government attempting to force unregistered congregations to register.

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.

Historically there is evidence of discrimination against Shi'a Muslims in recruitment for the country's military and domestic security services. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Defense did not recruit Shi'a for military service. The Ministry of Interior made increasing efforts to recruit additional Shi'a into nonmilitary security agencies during the reporting period.

On April 19, 2007, officials in the Ministry of Education announced that the Ministry, in conjunction with the MOJIA, was developing a new religious education curriculum to be taught in all public schools, beginning the next academic year. According to the Undersecretary of Islamic Affairs, the new curriculum will focus on practices in Islam and jurisprudence and will contain content against radicalism and extremism. The Undersecretary for Islamic Affairs reportedly stressed to the Ministry of Education that the new curriculum should be inclusive of the convictions of all branches of Islam.

Islamic studies are a part of the curriculum in Government schools and mandatory for all public school students. The decades-old curriculum is based on the Maliki school of Sunni theology. Proposals to include the Ja'afari traditions of Shi'a Islam in the curriculum have been rejected.

The civil and criminal legal systems consist of a complex mix of courts based on diverse legal sources, including Sunni and Shi'a Shari'a (Islamic law), tribal law, and other civil codes and regulations. The number of Shi'a Shari'a judges was slightly higher than the number of their Sunni counterparts. Although the Constitution provides for women's political rights, Shari'a governs personal status.

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 originate, including marriage. While both Shi'a and Sunni women have the right to initiate a divorce, religious courts may refuse the request. Women of either branch of Islam may own and inherit property and may represent themselves in all public and legal matters. In the absence of a direct male heir, a Shi'a woman may inherit all property. In contrast, in the absence of a direct male heir, a Sunni woman inherits only a portion as governed by Shari'a; the balance is divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased. A Muslim woman may legally marry a non-Muslim man only if he first converts to Islam. In such marriages, the children automatically are considered Muslim.

In divorce cases, the courts routinely grant Shi'a and Sunni women custody of children until an age at which custody reverts to the father based on Ja'afari and Maliki Islamic law, respectively. 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.

There are no restrictions on the number of citizens permitted to make pilgrimages to Shi'a shrines and holy sites in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The Government monitors travel to Iran and scrutinizes carefully those who choose to pursue religious study there.

The Government does not designate religion or sect on national identity documents. Upon the birth of a child, parents applying for a birth certificate are asked to provide the child's religion (not sect), but the Government-issued birth certificate does not include this information.

The law does not prohibit conversion from one religion to another.

The following holy days are considered national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Ashura, and the Islamic New Year. Leaders representing many religious groups visited the country and met with Government and civic leaders. These included the Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church in India, the highest official in the church.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government places limits on this right and continues to exert a level of control and to monitor both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Members of other religious groups 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, such as crosses and statues of deities and saints.

The Government funds, monitors, and closely controls all official religious institutions, including Shi'a and Sunni mosques, Shi'a ma'tams (religious community centers), Shi'a and Sunni waqfs (religious endowments), and the religious courts, which represent both the Ja'afari (Shi'a) and Maliki (Sunni) schools of Islamic jurisprudence. The Government rarely interferes with what it considers legitimate religious observances. The Government permits public religious events, most notably the large annual commemorative marches by Shi'a Muslims during the Islamic months of Ramadan and Muharram, but police closely monitor such events.

Shi'a are underrepresented in the Ministry of Education in both the leadership and in the ranks of head teachers who teach Islamic studies and supervise and mentor other teachers. At the secondary school level, there were two Islamic studies head teachers who were Shi'a, out of more than a dozen. Although there were many Islamic studies teachers who were Shi'a, they were discouraged from introducing content about Shi'a traditions and practices and instructed to follow the curriculum.

Curriculum specialists in the Islamic Studies Department at the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Directorate are all Sunni. The Curriculum Directorate formed a separate committee of Shi'a teachers and clerics, along with members of the Curriculum Directorate, to develop the Islamic studies curriculum for the Ja'afari Institute.

Converts to Islam from other religious groups were not uncommon, especially in cases of marriage between Muslim men and non-Muslim women. These converts were normally welcomed into the Muslim community. On the other hand, converts from Islam to other religious groups were not well tolerated by society. It was reported that families and communities often shunned these individuals and sometimes subjected converts to physical abuse. Some of these converts believed it necessary to leave the country permanently.

In newer towns such as Hamad Town and Isa Town, which often have mixed Sunni and Shi'a populations, there tended to be a disproportionate number of Sunni mosques. In Hamad Town, where the population was estimated to be more than 50 percent Shi'a, there were 24 Sunni mosques and 2 Sunni grand mosques, but only 4 Shi'a mosques and no Shi'a grand mosques. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has not approved applications for the Shi'a community to establish ma'tams in Hamad Town. As an alternative, individuals in the Shi'a community have converted parts of their homes into ma'tams. Land has been given to establish the Sunni Hamad Town Charity Fund, but no land has been similarly granted to the Shi'a community, which has rented an existing building for the offices of the Shi'a Charity Fund.

The MOJIA has repeatedly denied a Bahá'í congregation a license to function, although the group has not sought official recognition in many years, and it refuses to recognize the congregation; but the Bahá'í community continued to gather and worship freely without Government interference. While the MOJIA views Bahá'ísm as an inauthentic offshoot of Islam and blasphemous, some other Government ministries included Bahá'í as a religion choice in "drop-down" computer menus for citizens applying for certain Government documents.

Bibles and other Christian publications are displayed and sold openly in local bookstores that also sold Islamic and other religious literature. Churches also sold Christian materials, including books, music, and messages from Christian leaders, openly and without restriction. Religious tracts of all branches of Islam, cassettes of sermons delivered by Muslim preachers from other countries, and publications of other religions were readily available. However, for several years, the Ministry of Information has prohibited the publishing and sale of several books written by Sunni authors who converted to Shi'ism, as part of an ongoing ban on certain books covering sensitive topics. In addition, a Government-controlled proxy server prohibited user access to Internet sites considered to be antigovernment or anti-Islamic.

Multiple requests sent to the Ministry of Information in the last several years for the Government-run TV station to make live broadcasts of Friday sermons from Shi'a mosques, and not just from Sunni mosques, have not received responses.

Although there were exceptions, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoyed a favored status. Sunnis often received preference for employment in sensitive Government positions, in the managerial ranks of the civil service, and in the military. Shi'a citizens did not hold significant posts in the defense and internal security forces, although they were found in the enlisted ranks. In recent years, the Ministry of Inte-

rior has made efforts to reform hiring practices and has increased the hiring of Shi'a citizens. In 2004 the Ministry of the Interior established a community police program to place Shi'a men and women on the streets in Shi'a neighborhoods.

In 2005 a Christian church with more than 1,000 members filed an application with the Ministry of Social Development to form a second parish. The diocese assigned a temporary priest to serve members of the second parish; however, he only stayed 4 months, due to visa restrictions. The new parish applied for a 3-year resident visa for a permanent priest. By the close of the reporting period, Government officials still had not notified church leaders of a final decision on the request to allow a second parish or to grant a resident visa for a permanent priest. Further requests by church officials for information went unanswered.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were no acts of physical violence or harassment of Jews or vandalism of Jewish community institutions, such as schools, cemeteries, or the one synagogue in the country. Some anti-Semitic political commentary and editorial cartoons appeared, usually linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jews practiced their faith privately without interference from the Government.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Parliamentary and municipal elections were conducted in November and December 2006. Candidates associated with religion-based political societies won 32 of the 40 seats in the Council of Representatives. During the elections, candidates from religious political groups conducted their campaigns without any interference from the Government.

There was 1 Jewish member and 1 Christian member of the 40-member upper house of Parliament, the Shura Council, whose members were appointed in December 2006 by the King, following elections for the lower house. The Christian member was chosen by her colleagues to be the second deputy speaker for the Shura Council and is also one of the country's four representatives to the Arab Parliament. There was one Christian municipal council candidate in the elections, but he was defeated.

In April 2007 the Bahrain Businesswomen Society initiated a public awareness campaign on family law by sponsoring a panel discussion, the first public event on the topic for several months. The issue was not raised in any significant way during the November/December 2006 elections, despite an awareness campaign by the Supreme Council for Women in the fall of 2005 and seminars by civil society groups, which highlighted the need for a family law. This was followed by public debate and rallies both in favor of and against such a law.

During the reporting period, members of the Awali Community Church visited Christian prison inmates approximately monthly, to provide clothing and Christian literature. Members of other churches also made periodic visits to Christian prison inmates.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Regional Sunni-Shi'a tensions impacted intrareligious relationships. In general, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoyed a favored status. In the private sector, Shi'a tended to be employed in lower paid, less skilled jobs. Educational, social, and municipal services in most Shi'a neighborhoods were inferior to those found in Sunni communities.

The Islamic Enlightenment Society (Shi'a) held its annual conference in April 2007, aimed at diffusing tension between Muslim sects. The society invited national Sunni and Shi'a scholars to participate, but no Sunni scholars agreed to take part. Throughout the year the society invited Sunni and Shi'a scholars from outside the country to participate in seminars and to speak about increased Islamic unity and awareness. Some Sunni scholars accepted these invitations; for example, the former head of the Sunni waqf in Jordan visited to speak at a seminar.

SECTION IV. U.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 officials meet regularly with representatives of human rights nongovernmental organizations to discuss matters of religious freedom among other human rights-related topics. Regular meetings with human rights activists reaffirmed U.S. Government commitment to religious freedom and other human rights-related matters.

With U.S. Government funding, Arab Civitas continued to help the Ministry of Education develop a civic education program for public schools that includes lessons on human rights and tolerance.

To foster better relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the United States sponsored the Ramadan visit of a prominent American imam, who is the president of the Islamic Affairs Council of Maryland. He met with clerics, U.S. Government officials, members of the public, delivered lectures, and gave interviews to the local media promoting tolerance and moderation.

EGYPT

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, although the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Islam is the official state religion and Shari'a (Islamic law) is the primary source of legislation; religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited. Members of non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the Government generally worship without harassment and maintain links with coreligionists in other countries; however, members of religious groups that are not recognized by the Government, particularly the Baha'i Faith, experience personal and collective hardship.

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government declined during the period covered by this report; there continued to be abuses and numerous restrictions, and some improvements. Despite the passage of constitutional amendments that underscored the principle of equal citizenship rights regardless of religion, several high-profile prosecutions and legal decisions against religious minorities during the reporting period called into question the commitment of the Government to the principle of religious freedom. Some of these cases remained under appeal at the end of the reporting period.

On April 24, 2007, the Court of Administrative Justice ruled that the Interior Ministry was not obligated to recognize conversion to Christianity by Christian-born converts to Islam. The Court ruled that such recognition would violate the prohibition against apostasy under Islamic Shari'a and constitute a "manipulation of Islam and Muslims." This ruling was inconsistent with verdicts issued over the previous 3 years by another judge in the same court on behalf of 32 such converts and maintained a Government policy not to provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status. The previous court rulings had ordered the Interior Ministry to issue amended identification cards to the 32 citizens who sought to reconvert to Christianity.

In May and June 2007, officials of the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) arrested members of "the Quranis," who were subsequently charged with "denigrating religions." Sources close to Bahaa al-Accad, a convert from Islam to Christianity who was detained for 25 months without charge, reported SSIS officials threatened his personal security following his April 28, 2007 release. On February 22, 2007, Abdel Karim Nabil Suleiman, whose blog entries had contained strongly worded critiques of the practice of Islam and the Sunni Muslim orthodoxy of the Azhar educational system, was sentenced to 3 years in prison for "denigrating Islam." During the reporting period, SSIS agents reportedly detained a Jehovah's Witness and, while making demeaning comments about the Jehovah's Witnesses, struck the detainee repeatedly and threatened him and his family with ongoing harassment unless he agreed to become an informant on the Witness community.

The Government again opposed advances in the respect for religious freedom affecting Baha'is. A Government appeal of an April 2006 decision by the Administrative Court, which had supported the right of Baha'i citizens to receive ID cards and birth certificates with religion noted on the documents, resulted in a December 16, 2006 decision to overturn its ruling, and maintained the Government prohibition on Baha'i citizens obtaining identity cards.

In December 2005 the President decreed that permits for church repair and rebuilding, previously requiring his approval, could be granted by provincial governors. The Government announced that the purpose of this was to reduce delay. However, despite the 2005 decree, as well as a previous presidential decree in 1999 to facilitate approvals, many churches continued to encounter the same difficulties

in obtaining permits. The central Government continued to control the granting of permits for construction of new churches.

Tradition and some aspects of the law discriminated against religious minorities, including Christians and particularly Baha'is. The Government also continued to deny civil documents, including identity cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to members of the Baha'i community.

There continued to be religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society during the period covered by this report. On May 11, 2007, a group of Muslim citizens attacked Christians in the village of Bamha. In the ensuing violence, Muslims reportedly set fire to or looted 27 shops and homes of Christians and injured 12 Christians, 1 seriously. The police responded quickly to contain the incident and arrested approximately 60 people. On September 16, 2006 in Awlad Azaz village, Sohag governorate, some minor injuries occurred when Muslim and Christian villagers clashed over land use near the Monastery of Saint Shenouda. An SSIS official reportedly brokered a deal that resulted in the land being equally divided between Christians and Muslims.

The Ambassador, senior administration officials, and members of Congress continued to raise U.S. concerns about religious discrimination with senior Government officials. Specifically, the Embassy and other State Department officials raised concerns with the Government about ongoing discrimination faced by Christians in building and maintaining church properties despite Decree 291 of 2005, official discrimination against Baha'is, and the Government's treatment of Muslim citizens who wish to convert to other faiths.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 370,308 square miles and a population of 79 million, of whom almost 90 percent were estimated to be Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims constitute less than 1 percent of the population. Estimates of the percentage of Christians ranged from 8 to 12 percent, or between 6 and 10 million, the majority of whom belonged 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 community, established in the middle of the 19th century, included 16 Protestant denominations (Presbyterian, Episcopal (Anglican), Baptist, Brethren, Open Brethren, Revival of Holiness (Nahdat al-Qadaasa), Faith (Al-Eyman), Church of God, Christian Model Church (Al-Mithaal al-Masihi), Apostolic, Grace (An-Ni'ma), Pentecostal, Apostolic Grace, Church of Christ, Gospel Missionary (Al-Kiraaza bil Ingil), and the Message Church of Holland (Ar-Risaala)). There are also followers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was granted legal status in the 1960s. There are small numbers of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, but the Government does not recognize either group. The non-Muslim, non-Coptic Orthodox communities ranged in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands. The number of Baha'is is estimated at 2,000 persons. The Jewish community numbers fewer than 200 persons.

Christians are dispersed throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians is higher in Upper Egypt (the southern part of the country) and some sections of Cairo and Alexandria.

There are many foreign religious groups, especially Roman Catholics and Protestants who have had a presence in the country for almost a century. These groups engaged in education, social, and development work.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, under Article 46, provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites; however, the Government restricts on these rights in practice. Islam is the official state religion, and Shari'a is the primary source of legislation; religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited. Members of the non-Muslim religious minorities generally worship without legal harassment and may maintain links with coreligionists in other countries. Members of other religious groups that are not recognized by the Government, particularly the Baha'i Faith, continue to experience personal and collective hardship.

For a religious group to be officially recognized, it must submit a request to the Religious Affairs Department within the Ministry of Interior, which determines whether the group would, in its view, pose a threat or upset national unity or social peace. The Religious Affairs Department also consults the leading religious figures in the country, particularly the pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the sheikh

of Al-Azhar. The registration is then referred to the president, who issues a decree recognizing the new group, according to Law 15 of 1927. If a religious group bypasses the official registration process, participants are subject to detention and could also face prosecution and punishment under Article 98(F) of the Penal Code, which forbids the "denigration of religions." The Government last recognized a new religious group in 1990.

All mosques must be licensed. The Government appoints and pays the salaries of the imams who lead prayers in mosques and monitors their sermons. It does not contribute to the funding of Christian churches. The Minister of Awqaf reported that there were 95,000 mosques and small dedicated prayer areas called "zawayas" nationwide as of August 2006. The Government annexes new mosques every year but cannot keep pace with new mosque construction. A 2004 decree from the Minister of Awqaf removed the authority to issue permits to build mosques from governors and placed mosques in private homes under Awqaf administrative control. Approximately 5,000 mosques and zawayas remain unsupervised by the Ministry.

The contemporary interpretation of the 1856 Ottoman Hamayouni decree, partially still in force, requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to build new churches and synagogues. In addition, Ministry of Interior regulations, issued in 1934 under the Al-Ezabi decree, specify a set of 10 conditions that the Government must consider before a presidential decree for construction of a new non-Muslim place of worship can be issued. The conditions include the requirement that the distance between a church and a mosque be not less than 100 meters and that the approval of the neighboring Muslim community be obtained.

On March 27, 2007, in a referendum that independent observers stated was marred by low turnout, voters approved 34 constitutional amendments, including at least 2 with unclear implications for religious freedom. The amended Article One of the Constitution states that the country's political system is based on the principle of citizenship. The amended Article Five now prohibits the formation of parties and/or the conduct of political activities on a religious basis. Government supporters argued that these changes would separate religion from politics. Some critics argued, however, that the amendments are incompatible with Article Two, which continues to state that Shari'a is the basis for legislation.

There was controversy over the role of women in Islam after national newspapers quoted a fatwa by the country's Grand Mufti, Sheikh Ali Gomaa, declaring a woman unfit to be head of state because she would have to lead prayer, a role reserved for men. After considerable media coverage, the Mufti issued a clarification on February 2, 2007 claiming that he was only referring to the "traditional role of Caliph as both secular head of state and imam of the Muslims," and not to the contemporary era.

Additionally, as part of an apparent Government policy seeking to control public gatherings, the Ministry of Awqaf presented a bill to Parliament in October banning political gatherings and demonstrations inside mosques. The new draft law, which is still pending in Parliament, stipulates a 3-month imprisonment and $80 fine (LE 500) for anyone convicted of such offenses.

During the year Jehovah's Witnesses continued to engage the Government on their request to be granted legal registration, but no progress was achieved. Representatives from the Jehovah's Witnesses' New York headquarters, accompanied by European colleagues, visited the National Council for Human Rights, the Arab League, and others. SSIS agents detained, physically abused, and attempted to recruit as informer a Witness during the reporting period. In 2005 Jehovah's Witnesses reported that one of their members was similarly detained and assaulted by SSIS agents (See Abuses section). Jehovah's Witnesses have been banned in the country and faced varying degrees of harassment and surveillance by Government agents since 1960, despite a presence dating to the 1930s and legal registration in Cairo in 1951 and Alexandria in 1956. The Government attributes its refusal to grant the Jehovah's Witnesses registration to the opposition of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which has condemned the Jehovah's Witnesses as heretical, as well as to its lingering Nasser-era suspicion of links between Witnesses and the State of Israel. A 1964 Arab League decree labeled the Jehovah's Witnesses as Zionists.

The quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) is charged with furthering protections, raising awareness, and ensuring the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom. It is also charged with monitoring enforcement and application of international agreements. Five of its 25 reappointed members, as well as its president, are Copts.

In the NCHR's third report, issued in January 2007, the Citizenship Committee recommended changes in law and practice designed to ease sectarian tension, such as the passage of a unified law governing construction and repair of places of worship. The NCHR also called for spreading a culture of pluralism and tolerance, propagating respect for other religious groups through the media and religious institu-

tions, and solving Christian grievances locally without giving cause for foreign intervention. The Citizenship Committee reported that the NCHR received 32 complaints of missing young Coptic women during the 9-month period from March to December 2006. The NCHR referred these complaints to the Interior Ministry which, in most cases, replied that the women had eloped with Muslim men, converted to Islam of their free will, and had chosen to leave their families without prior notice because they feared reprisal on the part of their families. The NCHR also recommended training security officers to handle disputes arising from sectarian conflicts and emergencies. The report called for the removal of all the impediments that restrict the participation of Christians and women from politics and for the encouragement of young men and women to play a part in decision-making moving towards political reformation. The report stated that the NCHR had received a total of 57 formal complaints pertaining to religious freedom, which it sent to relevant authorities for action. The NCHR reported it received replies from Government ministries and other bodies regarding 36 of the complaints.

In addition to complaints by Christian citizens to the NCHR, there were also 14 complaints from Baha'is, one of which was signed by 51 complainants who sought the right to have their religion listed on official papers. The report indicated that the NCHR discussed Baha'i concerns with the Ministry of Interior with a view to resolving the issue to the satisfaction of all parties. The NCHR submitted a request to the Prime Minister on December 26, 2006 seeking the removal of the religion field from the Government-issued identification cards, but the religion field remained a mandatory section on them at the end of the reporting period.

The NCHR report noted one complaint received from a Jehovah's Witness, Michael Geyad Kamel Girguis, who had obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in medicine with highest honors and excellent grades and who believed he should have been appointed as a doctor at the Ain Shams University Hospital. Girguis learned from the technical affairs office of the hospital that he had been denied the job by the security office at the Ministry of Higher Education because of his affiliation with Jehovah's Witnesses. The NCHR report noted that the Council is pursuing the Girguis case with the Ministry of Higher Education.

The following holy days are designated national holidays: Eid Al-Fitr, Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Coptic Christmas (January 7).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The approval process for church construction continued to be hindered by lengthy delays often measured in years. Although Government officials maintain that President Mubarak approves all requests for permits presented to him, independent critics charge that delays by the Interior Ministry and/or local authorities cause many requests to reach the President slowly or not at all. Some churches have complained that local security officials have blocked church repairs or improvements even when a permit has been issued. Others suggest unequal enforcement of the regulations pertaining to church and mosque projects. Many churches face difficulty in obtaining permits from provincial officials.

According to statistics published in the Government's Official Gazette, 21 presidential decrees were issued from July 1, 2006, through June 30, 2007, for church-related construction, comprising 20 permits functioning to legalize existing unlicensed churches and 1 for a completely new facility; renovation/repair is handled now at the governorate level, per decree 291 of 2005.

In 2005 President Mubarak issued Decree 291/2005, which delegated authority to the country's 26 governors to grant permits to Christian denominations that seek to expand or rebuild existing churches. The decree also stated that churches could undertake basic repairs and maintenance subject only to the provision of written notification to the local authorities. Decree 291 noted that the governors must examine all applications for rebuilding or expansion, which must be supported by unspecified supporting documents, within 30 days of submission. According to the new decree, "permits may not be refused except with a justified ruling." Decree 291 also cancelled a 1999 decree aimed at improving the permit process for church repair. (Presidential Decree 453 of 1999 had made the repair of all places of worship subject to a 1976 civil construction code. Although this decree made mosque and church repairs technically subject to the same laws, authorities enforced the laws more strictly for churches than for mosques.)

A year and half after promulgation of Decree 291/2005, church and lay leaders have complained that the permit process remains susceptible to delay by local officials. They have further charged that some local authorities refused to process applications without certain "supporting documents" that were virtually impossible to obtain (e.g., a presidential decree authorizing the existence of a church that had been

established during the country's monarchical era). Others complain that some local authorities categorize routine repairs and maintenance (e.g., painting of walls and plumbing repairs) as expansion/reconstruction projects, thus requiring formal permits versus simple notification. They also maintain that security forces blocked them from using permits that had been issued, and at times denied them permits, for repairs to church buildings and the supply of water and electricity to existing church facilities. Incidents of blocked or delayed permits varied, often depending on the attitude of local security officials and the governorate leadership toward the church and on their personal relationships with representatives of the Christian churches. As a result, congregations have experienced lengthy delays—lasting for years in many cases—while waiting for new church building permits.

On October 15, 2006, *Watani* newspaper published an interview with General Nabil Al Ezaby, the Governor of Assuit, who asserted that not less than 120 churches had received reconstruction permits in the past 6 months. Subsequently, the *Watani* reporter learned from the governor's office that 58 churches had received repair permits, but when pressed for details the governor's office was only able to provide a list of 16 churches.

At the unlicensed Evangelical Church in Maadi, a suburb of Cairo, police reportedly halted a reconstruction project in 2004 and prevented church members from entering the church. Work on the church remained suspended during the reporting period. For 50 years the church has been unable to obtain a license.

The Assiut bishopric has been waiting a decade for local officials to issue a building permit for a new church in the governorate's Arbaeen District, despite a 1997 order from the President and approval from the Ministry of Interior to issue the decree. Assiut's El Hamra District and Burg al Arab, Alexandria Governorate, have been waiting since 1997 and 1988, respectively. The Brothers denomination, also in Assiut Governorate, received a permit to build a church in 2001, but local police stopped construction of the building's foundation.

After 18 years St. George Church in Dafesh, a majority Christian community near Assiut, Upper Egypt, obtained approval from the local governor in 2000 to build a new church to replace the original building, which had become too small to accommodate the growing community. Shortly after construction began in 2000 the new site was vandalized. The Government halted construction, ostensibly because the church had only obtained local approval and not the presidential decree required to build a new church. Construction remained halted at the end of the period covered by this report. The congregation continued to worship at the older site.

In 1999 the governor of Assiut issued a decree to St. John the Baptist Church at Awlad Elias in Sadfa, near Assiut, stating that the Orthodox church was given a license to effect several remodeling projects and restoration projects. In 2001, however, Sadfa police halted repairs because authorities believed that the church would enlarge its size by extending the building into the churchyard. After negotiations with SSIS, the church received permission to demolish a wall to extend its size. However, after the newspaper *Watani* published an article exposing this issue and the outcome, SSIS officials halted construction a second time. As of the end of the reporting period, construction had not resumed, and the church was still waiting for the Ministry of Interior to permit resumption of repairs. The congregation was forced to erect a tent in the small church courtyard to conduct prayers.

Despite governorate level approval in 2001 for restorations to the Mar Guirguis Church in Sahel Salim, Assiut, local authorities blocked work on the church under a variety of pretexts until a presidential decree in June 2005 paved the way for the complete rebuilding of the church, which subsequently occurred.

In Ezbet al-Nakhl, East Cairo, Coptic leaders of the Church of the Archangel Mikhail received permission from the Ministry of Interior in 1996, ratified by the Governor of Cairo in 2001, to expand the church to accommodate its growing congregation. However, local authorities in the district of al-Marg refused to accept the request to expand the church without a presidential decree, which was required for the renovation. The church, which had originally sought a presidential decree in 1987, had not been able to obtain one, and the project remained frozen at the end of the period covered by this report. Government officials asserted that the project was frozen because church officials did not employ the proper procedures while seeking a presidential decree, therefore making it illegal to renovate the church.

Local authorities have also closed down unlicensed buildings used as places of worship. As a result of restrictions, some communities use private buildings and apartments for religious services or build without permits. In 2005 SSIS officials threatened to demolish the Apostolic Church in Abowan, Minya, which has operated without a Government permit since 1984, on the grounds that it was structurally unsound. Nonetheless, the church continued to operate during the reporting period.

In January 2006 there were sectarian clashes in the settlement of Udayssat, near Luxor, after Christians conducted Epiphany services in a building that had intermittently served as an unlicensed church since 1971. Several hundred Muslim residents of the area surrounded the building, vandalized the property, and attempted to set it ablaze. In the ensuing melee, approximately a dozen persons, both Christian and Muslim, were injured, along with several policemen. Assailants killed a 47-year-old Christian farmer from the settlement, Kamal Shaker Megalaa, as he returned from his fields. The Luxor district attorney ordered the arrest and investigation of several Muslims from Udayssat on suspicion of involvement in his killing; all were released without charges in May 2007.

Hala Helmy Boutros, a Christian activist and blogger based in Qena Governorate, reported that the authorities in Qena ordered her to suspend her blog, Aqbat Bela Hudood (Copts Without Borders), which discussed complaints of persecution by the Coptic minority. (Boutros wrote under the pseudonym of Hala El-Masry.) Boutros had accused the authorities of complicity in the sectarian violence against Copts in January 2006 in the village of Udayssat. Boutros had attempted to travel to the United States in June 2006 to attend a conference on Coptic Christian issues, but authorities at Cairo International Airport prevented her from leaving the country. After a June 25, 2006 court hearing, at which Boutros was ordered to pay bail of $526 (LE 3,000), she was released. The case against Boutros, who was charged with "spreading false news and disrupting social harmony between Christians and Muslims," remained pending at the end of the reporting period. Boutros remained the target of a judicial investigation and is prohibited from leaving the country.

In 2005 the Administrative Judiciary Court in Alexandria annulled a decree issued by the Minister of Information that had banned veiled anchorwomen in television programs. The court established that the Ministry of Information's decree violated Article 47 of the Constitution, which provides for freedom of religion. State-run television refused to comply with the 2005 judicial ruling, and in March 2007 the court told anchorwomen Hala El-Malki and Ghada El-Tawil that it had already dealt with the case and could do nothing to enforce its ruling. In April, 2007 Malki and Tawil stated they would seek to appeal. Their case remained unresolved at the end of the reporting period. On June 21, 2007 however, Hala Al-Malki anchored a program on national state television while wearing a head-scarf (hijab). Hany Ghafar, the executive in charge, stated that it was Malki's decision to wear the hijab.

The Government outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which operates missionary, charity, and political activities, in 1954 but has tolerated its operations with varying levels of interference. Muslim Brothers speak openly and publicly about their views and have identified themselves publicly during the reporting period as members of the organization, although they remain subject to arbitrary treatment and pressure from the Government. During the period covered by this report, hundreds of MB members were arrested and charged with membership in an illegal organization, planning to revive the activities of the banned group, possessing antigovernment leaflets, obstructing the Constitution and the law, and organizing demonstrations without obtaining prior security permission. Authorities prevented several other MB members from traveling abroad. After a militia-style demonstration and parade by mask-wearing MB students at Al-Azhar University on December 14, 2006 the Government arrested scores of MB activists, including their third-ranking official, Khairat Al-Shatir. In January 2007 the Government announced plans to try Shatir and 39 other MB members before military tribunals. Despite two separate court rulings ordering the release of Shatir and his coaccused, the Government commenced the military tribunal at Haykstep military base, near Cairo, on April 26, 2007 but immediately adjourned the trial. Shatir and dozens of other MB members remained in detention, awaiting resumption of their trial, at the end of the reporting period.

Eighty-eight independent members of Parliament associated with the Muslim Brotherhood served in the People's Assembly during the reporting period. On April 29, 2007, security forces arrested two MB members of Parliament in Menoufiya, ignoring their parliamentary immunity, but released them after 24 hours.

On June 11, 2007, candidates contested 88 seats in national elections for the Shura Council, the higher legislative body. Independent candidates affiliated with the MB unsuccessfully contested 19 of the seats. Security forces arrested scores of MB activists in the lead up to those elections. Despite Article 5 of the Constitution, which bans any political activity based on religion, some MB-affiliated candidates ran openly under the slogan "Islam is the solution" and displayed MB insignia on their campaign materials. They argued that Article Two of the Constitution, which states that Shari'a is the basis of legislation, allowed such activity.

The Government generally tolerated foreign religious groups if they did not proselytize. However, the Government over the past several years, including during the reporting period, refused reentry into the country of several individuals suspected of proselytizing.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of authors facing trial or charges related to writings or statements considered heretical during the reporting period.

Various ministries are legally authorized to ban or confiscate books and works of art upon obtaining a court order. The Council of Ministers may order the banning of works that it deems offensive to public morals, detrimental to religion, or likely to cause a breach of the peace. The Islamic Research Center (IRC) at Al-Azhar University has legal authority to censor and, since 2004, confiscate, any publications dealing with the Qur'an and the authoritative Islamic traditions (Hadith). In recent years, the IRC has passed judgment on the suitability of nonreligious books and artistic productions, and there were several new cases of confiscation during the period covered by this report. Al-Azhar has the legal right to recommend confiscation, but the actual act of confiscation requires a court order.

In 2003 the Ministry of Justice issued a decree authorizing Al-Azhar sheikhs to confiscate publications, tapes, speeches, and artistic materials deemed inconsistent with Islamic law. There were no court-ordered book confiscations during the year, but the Government permitted greater confiscatory authority to Al-Azhar University and acted on its recommendations.

After Islamic thinker Mohamed Emara published a book in late 2006 that generated accusations of anti-Christian bias, the Ministry of Islamic Endowments withdrew the first edition of the book from the market and republished it without the offending sections. Entitled *The Sedition of Takfir (labeling one's opponents as apostates): Concerning Shias, Wahabis, and Sunnis*, the book was distributed by the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, affiliated with the Ministry of Islamic Endowments (number 142 of the monthly series *Islamic Issues*), and sold at the subsidized price of 17 US cents (LE 1). The first edition of the book reportedly repeated a medieval denunciation of Christians as apostates from Islam who could legitimately be killed and have their wealth confiscated. The main topic of the book was a refutation of takfir, with the author denouncing the practice of an Islamic sect declaring other sects infidels or apostates. The first edition book sold out in 1 day. Emara later issued a statement of apology and clarification that he sent to all newspapers insisting that he had inadvertently quoted the line "Christians and Jews may legitimately be killed and their money confiscated" from the medieval scholar El-Ghazali. A new edition is now on the market.

On January 29, 2007, *Al-Fagr* newspaper reported that a new book, entitled *Studies of Sects (Dirasaat fi-al-Firak)*, by Abdel Kader El-Bahrawy, a philosophy professor at Benha University, was offensive to Copts because it claimed they harbored a "grudge" against Muslims. Bahrawy's book was part of the required philosophy curriculum for Benha University students. After learning of the controversy, Bahrawy apologized, removed the book from the syllabus, and halted further publication.

On September 24, 2006, Information Minister Anas al-Fiqi issued a decree banning the distribution of editions of some Western newspapers for containing articles offending Islam and the Prophet Mohammed. The Minister stated that the ban applied to issue 19324 of the French daily *Le Figaro*, issue 216 of the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, and issue 14 of the British *Guardian Weekly* for containing articles that "denigrated Islam," in that they claimed that Islam was spread by the sword and described its prophet as a messenger of evil, a polygamist, and a killer of Jews.

On October 17, 2006, authorities banned a book that criticized the rising influence of a new generation of "televangelists" who advocate the Islamization of society. Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Center confiscated copies of Mohammed Fattuh's book *Modern Sheikhs and the Industry of Religious Extremism*. Also in October, Al-Azhar banned a book "Daily Life in the Medieval Islamic World," by James E. Lindsay, on the grounds that it contained information not in accordance with the principles of Islam. There was no evidence of any effort to confiscate the book.

In a February 2007 workshop on "Freedom of thought and expression in the cultural field," organized by the Cairo Center for Human Rights, intellectuals, and civil society and human rights activists called for respect of the 'other,' avoiding the exploitation of religious differences to inflame sectarian conflict, and fostering civilization and cultural dialogue. The Secretary-General of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, Hafez Abu Saeda, criticized the practice of book banning and confiscation, describing it as a flagrant violation of freedom of expression. He asserted that more than 80 books had been confiscated by the security authorities in coordi-

nation with Al-Azhar during the reporting period. The confiscated books, education specialist Kamal Moghieth charged, did not address religion per se, but discussed religio-political conflicts in Saudi Arabia.

In January 2007 the authorities at the Cairo International Book Fair prohibited the display of five books by noted feminist Nawal Al-Sadawi on the grounds that her books insulted the monotheistic religious groups, including Islam, and engaged in blasphemy. Islamic Research Center officials asserted that Al-Sadawi's play, *God Submits his Resignation at the Summit*, constituted extreme disrespect for Islam. (In 2000, Sadawi and her husband successfully fought an extended legal battle against Islamist lawyer Nabih Al-Wahsh who had sued to have Sadawi divorced from her husband on the grounds that she was an atheist.)

The local media, including state television and newspapers, give prominence to Islamic programming. Christian television programs are aired weekly on state-owned Nile Cultural TV. The weekly religion page of the prominent daily *al-Ahram* often reports on conversions to Islam and states that converts improved their lives and found peace and moral stability.

Most press organizations include one or more journalists covering the so-called Coptic file, responsible for following news that pertains to the Church and covering sectarian issues and events.

On March 19, 2007, the independent newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm* reported that Sheikh Youssef Al-Badry, a member of the Higher Council for Islamic Affairs, asked the public prosecutor to open a case against Adel Hamouda, editor in chief of *Al-Fagr* newspaper, and Mohamed Al-Baz, a reporter at the same newspaper, for humiliating the Imam of Al-Azhar (and by extension all Muslims) by depicting him in a doctored photograph on the front page of *Al-Fagr* on March 17, 2007, clothed in Papal garb and holding a cross, under the headline "Don't visit the Pope who insulted the prophet, Grand Imam of the Vatican."

Coptic activists complained that a Government-funded Web site, belonging to the Egyptian Islamic Council, contained an article entitled "Islam vs. Jews and Christians (Ahl al-Kitab): Past and Present" by Dr. Maryam Jameelah which asserted that Muslims should not make "peace with [Jews and Christians] until we can humble them and gain the upper hand."

Coptic activists also complained that *El-Megahed*, an Islamic-themed magazine published by the Department of Officers Morale within the army, devoted a portion of its July/August 2006 issue to an article that criticized Christians as infidels.

Pope Shenouda III has banned Coptic travel to Jerusalem since the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979. However, press reports, citing Israeli Interior Ministry statistics, indicated that an estimated 735 Copts visited Israel in 2004 for pilgrimage. There were no statistics available for subsequent periods. According to *Al-Ahram* on September 4, 2006, Pope Shenouda III forbade Copts to go to Jerusalem and stated that anyone who visits Jerusalem while it is still under the Israeli occupation would be subject to "ecclesiastical punishment," including the deprivation of communion. In a March 2007 meeting with the Lions Club of Cairo, Pope Shenouda III asserted, however, that he does not oppose the travel of Copts to Israel for business, study, or pilgrimage.

On April 21, 2007, the Supreme Administrative Court banned Gamal Amgad Michael, a Christian citizen, from visiting Jerusalem. The court upheld the minister of interior's decree banning citizens from visiting holy sites in Israel. The court based its verdict on the Government's responsibility to protect its citizens, including by banning them from visiting countries where acts of violence and killing occur. The court also, however, acknowledged the existence of a legislation "vacuum" and called on the Government to issue new laws/regulations governing travel to disputed or dangerous countries.

The Government has not granted formal legal recognition to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), or Mormons, in Cairo. The LDS Church has maintained an organized congregation in the country for more than 30 years. The Government has raised no objection. Some members, particularly those who have converted to the LDS Church overseas and then returned to the country, complain of excessive surveillance from State Security and sometimes avoid meetings from fear of harassment.

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 presidents or deans of public universities, and they are rarely nominated by the Government to run in elections as National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates. For the first time in more than 30 years, a Copt was appointed in 2006 as one of the country's 26 governors, in Qena. As of June 30, 2007, there were 6 Christians (5 appointed, 1 elected) in the 454-seat Peo-

ple's Assembly; 6 Christians (all appointed) in the 264-seat Shura Council; and 2 Christians in the 32-member cabinet.

Christians, who represented between 8 and 12 percent of the population, hold less than 2 percent of the seats in the People's Assembly and Shura Council.

Government practices discriminated against Christians in hiring for the public sector, staff appointments to public universities, and in barring them from study at Al-Azhar University (a publicly funded institution). Public funds pay Muslim imams but not Christian clergy. There are few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. In general, public university training programs for Arabic language teachers bar non-Muslims because the curriculum involves study of the Qur'an.

In January 2007 Muslim students at Ein Shams University accused a Christian lecturer, Ghada Adel Youssef, on the faculty of Specialized Education (Music Department), of discrimination against Muslim students. The university responded by terminating the Christian teacher's appointment and replacing her with a Muslim. The dismissed Christian teacher alleged that her credentials were superior to those of her replacement and filed discrimination complaints against the university.

According to media reports in March 2007, officials at the Al-Ayat Government Industrial Secondary School in Giza governorate attempted to require all female students, including Christians, to wear Islamic headscarves (hijab). The Ministry of Education responded quickly, noting that forcing anyone to wear the hijab is a violation of law. Minister of Education Yusri al-Gamal categorically denied rumors that the Ministry sought to require female students to wear headscarves and added that the Ministry bans wearing the hijab in primary schools and allows it only in preparatory and secondary schools upon written request from a girl's parent.

In January 2007, continuing a practice that resumed in 2005 and 2006, Jewish pilgrims (mostly visiting from Israel) celebrated the Abu Hasira festival. In 2004 the Supreme Administrative Court upheld a lower court's 2001 decision to ban the 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 was not held during the period 2002–2004.

The application of family law, including marriage, divorce, alimony, child custody, and burial, is based on an individual's religion. In the practice of family law, the Government recognizes only the three "heavenly religions," Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Muslim families are subject to Shari'a, Christian families to canon law, and Jewish families to Jewish law. In cases of family law disputes involving a marriage between a Christian woman and a Muslim man, the courts apply Shari'a. The Government does not recognize the marriages of citizens adhering to religions other than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

Under Shari'a as practiced in the country, non-Muslim males must convert to Islam to marry Muslim women, but non-Muslim women need not convert to marry Muslim men. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men.

Inheritance laws for all citizens are based on the Government's interpretation of Shari'a. Muslim female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir's inheritance. Christian widows of Muslims have no automatic inheritance rights but may be provided for in testamentary documents.

Under Shari'a, converts from Islam lose all rights of inheritance. However, because the Government offers no legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status, inheritance rights may appear not to have been lost.

The law provides for khul' divorce, which allows a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided that she is willing to forego all of her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. In practice some judges have applied the law in such a manner as to cause lengthy bureaucratic delays for the thousands of women who have filed for khul' divorce. Many women have complained that after being granted khul', the required child alimony is not paid.

The Coptic Orthodox Church excommunicates female members who marry Muslim men and requires that other Christians convert to Coptic Orthodoxy to marry a member of the church. Coptic males are prevented from marrying Muslim women by both civil and religious laws. A civil marriage abroad is an option should a Christian male and a Muslim female citizen decide to marry; however, their marriage would not be legally recognized in the country. Additionally, the woman could be arrested and charged with apostasy, and any children from such a marriage could be taken and assigned to the physical custody of a male Muslim guardian, as determined by the Government's interpretation of Shari'a. The Coptic Orthodox Church

permits divorce only in specific circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to deny civil documents, including ID cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to members of the Baha'i community. On December 16, 2006, the Supreme Administrative Court overturned a lower court ruling, deciding that Baha'is may not list their religion in the mandatory religion "field" on obligatory Government identity cards. In May 2006 the Ministry of Interior had appealed an administrative court ruling issued in April 2006, which supported the right of Baha'i citizens to receive ID cards and birth certificates with the Baha'i religion noted on the documents. The Government insists that religious identification on national identity cards is necessary to determine which laws apply in civil cases. The Government indicated that all citizens must be in possession of new computerized identification cards by January 1, 2007 and that old, hand-written cards would no longer be valid. However, in May 2007 the Government announced that this requirement had been postponed. The Government has issued passports for Baha'i citizens and has stated that it extended the deadline for the use of the old identity cards as a temporary measure until January 2008. (National passports do not indicate the holder's religion.) Citizens not in possession of valid identity documents may be subject to detention.

Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Center issued a legal opinion in December 2003 condemning Baha'is as apostates. In May 2006 the Minister of Justice requested guidance from the IRC in preparation for the Government's appeal against the landmark April 4, 2006 case in support of Baha'i rights. The IRC issued an Islamic legal interpretation stating that the Baha'i Faith was a "heresy." The 2006 interpretation referenced a 1985 opinion that had accused Baha'is of working in support of Zionism and imperialism and labeled them as "apostates."

Law 263 of 1960, still in force, bans Baha'i institutions and community activities and strips Baha'is of legal recognition. During the Nasser era, the Government confiscated all Baha'i community properties, including Baha'i centers, libraries, and cemeteries. The Government has asserted that national identity cards require all citizens to be categorized as Muslims, Christians, or Jews. The Ministry of Interior has reportedly, on rare occasions, issued documents that list a citizen's religion as "other" or simply do not mention religion. But it is not clear when these conditions apply. Baha'is and other religious groups that are not associated with any of the three "heavenly religions" have been compelled either to misrepresent themselves or go without valid identity documents.

Those without valid identity cards encounter difficulty registering their children in school, opening bank accounts, and establishing businesses. Baha'is at age 16 face additional problems under Law 143/1994, which makes it mandatory for all citizens to obtain a new identification card featuring a new national identification number. Police occasionally conduct random inspections of identity papers and those found without identity cards can be detained until the document is provided to the police. Some Baha'is without identity cards reportedly stay home to avoid police scrutiny and possible arrest.

In May 2004 the Government confiscated the identity cards of two Baha'is who were applying for passports. Officials told them that they were acting on instructions from the MOI to confiscate any identity cards belonging to Baha'is.

Some elements of the press published articles critical of the Baha'is. For example, on October 16, 2006, *Roz Al-Youssef*, a pro-government newspaper, published excerpts of a Government advisory report, which supported the MOI's petition to overturn the April 4, 2006 ruling. The report argued that because the Baha'i Faith was not recognized in the country as a "divine religion," its followers were not entitled to citizenship rights. The report argued that constitutional guarantees of freedom of belief and religion do not apply to the Baha'is and that the country is not bound under its commitment as a cosignatory to the U.N. Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The report also asserted that Baha'is are apostates, a threat to public order, and recommended that "methods must be defined that would insure that Baha'is are identified, confronted, and singled out so that they could be watched carefully, isolated and monitored in order to protect the rest of the population as well as Islam from their danger, influence, and teachings."

On May 29, 2007, SSIS agents arrested three men affiliated with the Qurani movement, a small group of Muslims who rely largely if not exclusively on the Qur'an as authoritative for Islam, to the exclusion of the prophetic traditions (hadith) and other sources of Islamic law. On May 31 and June 17, 2007, they arrested two additional Quranis. According to a lawyer with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, a respected Cairo-based advocacy group who attended some of

the police interrogations of the Quranis, interrogation of the detainees was confined to their religious views. One detainee told EIPR and the investigating prosecutor that he had been beaten and threatened with rape by a previous SSIS investigator. The five Quranis remained in detention without charge at the end of the reporting period.

On March 12, 2007, the Alexandria Court of Appeal upheld the conviction of 22-year-old student blogger Abdel Karim Nabil Suleiman. On February 22, 2007, the Alexandria Criminal Court convicted him of "denigrating" Islam and insulting President Mubarak through his blog entries and sentenced him to 4 years in prison (3 for denigrating Islam and 1 for insulting the President). On November 6, 2006, Alexandria security forces arrested Abdel Karim, whose blog entries had contained strongly worded critiques of the practice of Islam and Al-Azhar's Sunni Muslim orthodoxy. Abdel Karim had previously been detained on account of his writings for 18 days in October 2005. He had been expelled and reported to the authorities by Al-Azhar University for criticizing Islamic authority. At the end of the reporting period, his lawyers were preparing to appeal the decision to the Court of Cassation, the country's highest appeals court.

During the reporting period, SSIS agents reportedly detained a Jehovah's Witness and, during an interrogation in which security officials made demeaning comments about the Jehovah's Witnesses, struck the detainee repeatedly and threatened him and his family with ongoing harassment unless he agreed to become an informant on the Witness community. While Witnesses have reported varying degrees of harassment and surveillance by Government agents since 1960, senior international Witness leadership believed that their engagement of the Government over the past 2 years concerning their request for official recognition had resulted in a cessation of the policy of harassment and hostile surveillance.

The Government at times prosecutes members of religious groups whose practices are deemed to deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs and whose activities are alleged to jeopardize communal harmony. Shi'ite Muslim Mohamed Ramadan Hussein El-Derini, arrested in 2004 apparently due to his affiliation with Shi'a Islam, was released in June 2005, after having spent 15 months in administrative detention without charge or trial. There were credible reports that members of the SSIS repeatedly tortured and mistreated Derini while he was in custody.

The Government continued to try citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs. In 2005 the Maadi misdemeanor court issued a verdict in a blasphemy case involving Ibrahim Ahmad Abu Shusha and 11 of his followers, who had been detained absent an arrest warrant since 2004. The court sentenced Abu Shusha to 3 years' imprisonment for claiming to be divine and denigrating Islam. The court sentenced the 11 other defendants (including 3 women, 2 of whom are Abu Shusha's wives) to 1 year of imprisonment and ordered the confiscation of the leaflets and writings that propagated the group's ideology. In its reasoning, the court stated that there was sufficient evidence that Abu Shusha embraced beliefs that are contrary to and derogatory of Islam and that he tried to propagate those beliefs by attempting to show that he possessed divine powers. The court also asserted that freedom of belief does not include permission to deny the principles of heavenly religions. An appeals court reaffirmed the Abu Shusha sentences in July 2005. At the end of the reporting period, Abu Shusha's lawyers were seeking to appeal his case to the Court of Cassation. His case remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

In May 2003 the SSIS arrested Metwalli Ibrahim Metwalli Saleh, apparently because of his views on Islam. After eight separate rulings from the Supreme State Security Emergency Court ordering his release, Saleh, who had been in detention in Al-Wadi al-Gadid Prison, near Assiut, was released in April 2006.

Neither the Constitution nor the Civil and Penal Codes prohibit proselytizing, but police have harassed those accused of proselytizing on charges of ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.

While there are no legal restrictions on the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, there were occasional reports that police persecuted converts from Islam to Christianity. In April 2005 the SSIS detained Bahaa Al-Accad, a citizen who was born Muslim but who reportedly converted to Christianity. Accad was initially held at Tora Prison, south of Cairo. After a court ordered Accad's release from detention in August 2006, SSIS authorities deliberately ignored the ruling, eventually transferring him to Wadi el-Natroun Prison, located 60 miles north of Cairo along the highway to Alexandria. On April 28, 2007, the authorities released Accad after he had spent almost 2 years in prison without being formally charged with any crime.

The security services reportedly maintain regular and sometimes hostile surveillance of Muslim-born citizens who are suspected of having converted to Christianity. One of these converts also reported that officers from the security service pressured him to serve as an informant.

In May 2006 public prosecutor Maher Abdul Wahid ordered two Azharites, Abdul Sabur al-Kashef and Mohammed Radwan, to be tried by a low-level criminal court on charges of blaspheming Islam. Kashef was prosecuted for claiming to have seen God while Radwan was prosecuted for denying the existence of heaven and hell. Al-Kashef was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment while Radwan received 3 years. In mid-January 2007 El-Gamaleya Misdemeanor Court of Appeals reduced Kashef's sentence to 6 years' imprisonment and upheld the earlier ruling of 3-years for Radwan.

The law prescribes administrative steps pursuant to the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. The minor children of converts to Islam, and in some cases adult children, may automatically become classified as Muslims in the eyes of the Government irrespective of the religion of the other spouse. This practice is in accordance with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, which dictates "no jurisdiction of a non-Muslim over a Muslim."

On April 24, 2007, the Court of Administrative Justice ruled that the Interior Ministry was not obligated to recognize conversion to Christianity by Christian-born converts to Islam. The Court ruled that such recognition would violate the prohibition against apostasy under Shari'a and constitute a "manipulation of Islam and Muslims." This ruling was inconsistent with verdicts issued over the previous 3 years by the same court on behalf of 32 such converts and functioned to support a Government policy not to provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status. In April 2004 an administrative court had issued a verdict allowing Mona Makram Gibran, who had converted to Islam and later converted back to Christianity, to recover her original (Christian) name and identity. Some legal observers hoped the case would constitute a significant precedent as the Government has generally refused to acknowledge citizens' conversions from Islam to Christianity. The court's written verdict noted ". . . the Constitution guarantees equality among citizens . . . without any discrimination based on race, sex, language, or faith. The Government also guarantees freedom of thought and religious faith in accordance with Article 46 of the Constitution. . . . [The State] is legally committed to register the woman's real religion and is not allowed under any circumstance to use its assigned powers to force the woman to remain Muslim." Building on the precedent of the Gibran case, approximately 30 other citizens successfully sued to recover their Christian identities between 2004 and April 2007. The April 24, 2007 decision, however, appeared to imperil this precedent, although at the end of the reporting period, lawyers for the plaintiffs were appealing it. At the end of the reporting period, there were approximately 200 additional cases pending before the courts involving individuals who had converted to Islam but returned to Christianity, and who were attempting to recover their original Christian identities.

The Government does not recognize conversions of Muslims to Christianity or other religious groups, and resistance to such conversions by local officials constitutes a prohibition in practice. In the absence of a legal means to register their change in religious status, some converts resorted to soliciting illicit identity papers, often by submitting fraudulent supporting documents or bribing the Government clerks who process the documents. In such cases, authorities periodically charged converts with violating laws prohibiting the falsification of documents.

Under Shari'a as interpreted by the Government, a non-Muslim wife who converts to Islam must divorce her "apostate," non-Muslim husband. Upon the wife's conversion, local security authorities ask the non-Muslim husband if he is willing to convert to Islam; if he chooses not to, divorce proceedings begin immediately and custody of children is awarded to the mother.

In April 2005 the Family Court granted the divorce of Wafaa Riffat Adly, a Christian woman who had converted to Islam, from her Christian husband, Said Farouk Adly, after he refused to convert.

An estimated several thousand persons were imprisoned because of alleged support for or membership in Islamist groups seeking to overthrow the Government. The Government stated that these persons were in detention because of membership in or activities on behalf of violent extremist groups, without regard to their religious affiliation. Internal security services monitor groups and individuals suspected of involvement in or planning for extremist activity. Internal security agencies regularly detain such persons, and the state of emergency allows them to renew periods of administrative detention ad infinitum.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion carried out by the Government; however, there were again reports of forced conversions of Coptic women and girls to Islam by Muslim men. Reports of such cases are disputed and often include

inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. Observers, including human rights groups, find it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involve a female Copt who converts to Islam when she marries a Muslim male. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media.

Wafaa Constantin, a Christian woman whose alleged conversion to Islam in December 2004 sparked significant protests in Cairo, remained in seclusion in a Coptic church facility. During the reporting period, the Administrative Judicial Court of the State Council considered a lawsuit filed by Islamist Yusuf al-Badri and 10 attorneys demanding that Wafaa Constantin be handed over to Al-Azhar, on the strength of her declaration that she had embraced Islam. As a Muslim citizen, he argued, the Church has no jurisdiction over her in accordance with Article Two of the Constitution. On April 24, 2007, the State Council ruled that Constantin had chosen to remain Christian. At the end of the reporting period she remained in seclusion in a Church facility.

In February 2007 Muslim citizens set fire to Christian-owned shops in the village of Armant, Qena governorate, after reports of a love affair between a Muslim woman and a Coptic Christian man. Security forces deployed in the town, closed shops under a security decree, and detained eight Muslims and one Copt. Member of Parliament Mohamed al-Nubi and village leaders initiated a national conference on inter-religious dialogue to address the sectarian divide and reportedly brought together some 2,000 Muslims and Christians from across the country.

There are reports of Government authorities failing to uphold the law in sensitive conversion cases. 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 a marriage opposed by the girl's Christian parents. (Although the minimum age for marriage is 18 for both men and women, girls who are at least 16 but not yet 18 may marry if they have the approval of their parents, or, in cases where the girl asserts that she has converted to Islam, with the approval of a Muslim guardian.)

According to the Government's Instructions for Notaries Public, which implement Law 114 of 1947, persons age 16 and above may convert to Islam without parental consent. Christian activists assert that ignorance of the law and social pressure, including the centrality of marriage to a woman's identity, often affect a girl's decision to convert. Family conflict and financial pressure also are cited as factors.

According to *Watani* newspaper editor and publisher, Youssef Sidhom, and Christian lawyer Naguib Gabriel, the reporting period witnessed the apparent cessation of the required religious "advice and guidance sessions" in the case of Christian-born converts to Islam. According to Sidhom, the advice and guidance sessions had proved repeatedly to be instrumental in resolving disputed conversion cases, returning many Christian girls to their original faith and families. Sidhom complained that the decision to annul the advice and guidance sessions was taken by the Interior Ministry without any prior notice or discussion. Gabriel filed a lawsuit before the administrative court to restore the "advice and guidance sessions," but the court issued no judgment by the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who may have been abducted or illegally removed from the United States.

Anti-Semitism

The country's Jewish community numbers 200, most of them senior citizens. Anti-Semitic sentiments appeared in both the Government-owned and opposition press; however, there have been no violent anti-Semitic incidents in recent years. Anti-Semitic articles and opinion pieces appeared in the print media, and editorial cartoons appeared in the press and electronic media. Anti-Semitism in the media was common, but less prevalent than in recent years, and anti-Semitic editorial cartoons and articles depicting demonic images of Jews and Israeli leaders, stereotypical images of Jews along with Jewish symbols, and comparisons of Israeli leaders to Hitler and the Nazis were published throughout the year. These expressions occurred primarily in the Government-sponsored daily newspapers, *Al-Gumhuriyya, Akhbar Al-Yawm*, and *Al-Ahram*, but elicited no Government response. For example, on August 7, 2006, in an article in the Government-controlled daily newspaper *Al-Ahram*, the Grand Mufti Ali Gom'a criticized recent Israeli military action in Lebanon and wrote that Israeli "lies have exposed the true and hideous face of the blood suckers who . . . planned [to prepare] a matzo [unleavened Passover bread] using human blood."

On August 24, 2006, a Muslim cleric, Safwat Higazi, appeared on Dream TV to discuss recent media reports that he had issued a ruling (on the Islamic Al-Nas channel) that permitted the killing of Israeli Jews in Egypt. Higazi opined that killing of certain Israeli Jews (specifically adults who are serving in the Israeli Defense

Forces reserves) in the country was permissible. On September 13, 2006, *Al-Ahram* published an opinion column entitled "Who is the Nazi Now" and stated that "The war that Hitler led against the Jews was an excuse through which the Zionists justified their colonizing of Palestine . . . But the Jews, who escaped from oppression, oppressed the Palestinians . . . and thus, the victims of the old Nazis became the new Nazis . . . Who is the Nazi now? Günther Grass, who admitted the mistake he made when he was an adolescent? Or David Ben Gurion, Begin, Shamir, Sharon, Olmert, and people of their kind?"

The Government 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 few public attempts to distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli sentiment.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the Minister for Awqaf, Hamdy Zaqzouq, in a December 2006 press statement, the Government has appointed 50 women to roles as preachers (murshidat) to address gatherings of Muslim women in mosques, for the first time in the country's history.

A Coptic Christian woman was among 30 women judges appointed to the bench in early April.

Courts have normally not prosecuted officials suspected of responsibility for personal injuries or damages due to sectarian-based violence. However, the Government took positive steps in response to an April 2006 sectarian attack in Alexandria that led to mob violence the following day resulting in injuries to Copts and the burning and looting of Christian-owned shops. A parliamentary inquiry investigated the incidents and in January 2007 a police military tribunal in Cairo convicted 5 of 10 accused police officers on charges of dereliction of duty for failing to appear at their respective duty stations. The court also ratified previous penalties imposed on a group of police captains by an internal police review board, ruling that the captains should be excluded from service in the future. The tribunal also dismissed one brigadier general from service on grounds that he was incapable of performing the duties assigned to him, and fined a colonel and a major $250 (LE 1500) each. Final rulings had not been handed down against the remaining 5 officers by the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period Al-Azhar held a small number of interfaith discussions both inside the country and abroad, most of them in connection to the controversy surrounding Pope Benedict XVI's comments on the Prophet Muhammad. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Tantawi, a Government appointee, and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda III, participated in joint public events during Ramadan and Easter and in a Christian-Muslim dialogue in June 2006.

In January 2007 the NCHR released its third annual report, in which it recommended a solution for official recognition of Baha'is, discussed the complaints of Jehovah's Witnesses, and criticized both religious textbooks in schools and the curriculum taught in the Imams' Institution affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education for failing to address human rights topics. The report also encouraged the Government to pass a law for all religious groups addressing the construction of new places of worship.

An Islamic-Christian conference on September 7, 2006, in Al-Alamein called for the urgent development of religious discourse in order to "entrench nationalism and sense of belonging among all categories of the society." The meeting was organized by the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) and attended by Islamic and Christian scholars along with university professors, media representatives, and prominent figures. The conference called for rallying efforts to disseminate the moderate religious trends of both Islam and Christianity.

During the reporting period more than 170 political and human rights activists, Muslim and Christian intellectuals, and academics launched an initiative ("Egyptians Against Religious Discrimination") to promote religious tolerance and combat discrimination against non-Muslims. The idea originated in April 2006 after the attacks on Alexandria churches. Their aim is to achieve equal treatment for all citizens and enhance freedom of religion. On March 5, 2007, the movement issued a statement criticizing security service refusal to allow them to hold meetings to discuss Article Two of the Constitution.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Christians and Muslims share a common culture and live as neighbors throughout the country. However, religious tensions exist and individual acts of prejudice and violence occur.

On May 11, 2007, following Friday prayers in the village of Bamha, near Cairo, a group of Muslim citizens attacked Christian villagers, reportedly because they believed that the Christians were planning to build or enlarge a church without having obtained a license. The ensuing violence led to the arson or looting of 27 Christian-owned shops and homes, and injuries to 12 Christians, one seriously. Police responded quickly to contain the violence and detained approximately 60 mostly Muslim villagers. By the end of the reporting period, most detainees had been released, and the local authorities sought to arrange several reconciliation meetings in Bamha but had not pursued formal charges against those responsible for the violence.

In Awlad Azaz village, Sohag governorate, Muslim and Christian villagers clashed on September 16, 2006, over 14.5 acres (14 feddans) of land located outside the formal boundary fence of the Monastery of Saint Shenouda ("the White Monastery"). Although Christians had traditionally claimed the land, local authorities designated a portion of it as a cemetery for Muslims in 2003. After the monk who heads the monastery encouraged Christian villagers to cultivate the land, Muslim protestors used nearby mosque loudspeakers to call upon Muslims to defend the land against Christian "encroachment." Despite the rapid deployment of security forces in the area, the ensuing clashes resulted in minor injuries. Security officials, members of Parliament, and local officials in the governorate worked quickly to resolve the problem. A SSIS official reportedly brokered a deal that resulted in the land being equally divided between Christians and Muslims.

In a talk show aired by Dream TV in March 2007, noted television personality Mona al-Shazli hosted Muslim judges Magdi al-Garhi and Noha al-Zeini, who expressed their personal objections to Christians being appointed as judges. They asserted that judges are 'patrons' who are charged with authority and that Islam was explicit in rejecting the patronage of non-Muslims over Muslims. A number of Christian judges of the State Council, the highest administrative court in the country, held a meeting at the Judges' Club (a professional association) in which they demanded an apology from Garhi, with some demanding Garhi's resignation as secretary of the club.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Religious freedom is an important part of the bilateral dialogue. The right of religious freedom has been raised with senior Government officials by all levels of the U.S. Government, including by visiting members of Congress, the Secretary of State, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, the Ambassador, and other State Department and Embassy officials. The Embassy maintains formal contacts with the Office of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy also discusses religious freedom issues regularly in contacts with other Government officials, including governors and members of Parliament. The Ambassador has made public statements supporting religious freedom, interfaith understanding, and efforts toward harmony and equality among citizens of all religious groups. Specifically, the Embassy and other State Department officials raised concerns with the Government about ongoing discrimination faced by Christians in building and maintaining church properties despite Decree 291 of 2005, official discrimination against Baha'is, and the Government's treatment of Muslim citizens who wish to convert. In addition, the Embassy sent observers to attend court hearings concerning Baha'i efforts to attain identity documents.

The Embassy maintains an active dialogue with leaders of the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. The Embassy investigates complaints of official religious discrimination brought to its attention. It also discusses religious freedom with a range of contacts, including academics, businessmen, and citizens outside of the capital area. U.S. officials actively challenge anti-Semitic articles in the media through discussions with editors-in-chief and journalists.

U.S. programs and activities support initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom, including funding for CEOSS programs that work with Coptic community groups in Upper Egypt, as well as support for NGOs that monitor the country's media for occurrences of sectarian bias.

The U.S. Government is working to strengthen civil society, supporting secular channels and the broadening of a civic culture that promotes religious tolerance and

supporting projects that promote tolerance and mutual respect between different religious communities.

The Embassy supports the development of educational materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic-language and English-language curriculums.

The U.S. Government developed a version of the television program *Sesame Street* designed to reach remote households that has as one of its goals the promotion of tolerance, including among different religious groups. According to a recent household survey, the program, begun in 2000, is reaching more than 90 percent of elementary school-aged children.

The Embassy is also working with the Supreme Council of Antiquities to promote the conservation of cultural antiquities, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish historical sites.

IRAN

The Constitution states that the official religion of Iran is Islam, and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'afari (Twelver) Shi'ism. Article 4 of the Constitution states that all laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. The Government severely restricts freedom of religion.

There was continued deterioration of the extremely poor status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shi'a religious groups, most notably for Bahá'ís, as well as Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, and members of the Jewish community.

Reports of Government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs continued during the reporting period. Bahá'í religious groups often reported arbitrary arrests, expulsions from universities, and confiscation of property. Government-controlled media, including broadcast and print, intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities—particularly the Bahá'ís—during the reporting period.

Although the Constitution gives Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians the status of "protected" religious minorities, in practice non-Shi'a Muslims face substantial societal discrimination, and Government actions continued to support elements of society who create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities.

The U.S. Government makes clear its objections to the Government's harsh and oppressive treatment of religious minorities through public statements, support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, as well as diplomatic initiatives. Every year since 1999 the U.S. Secretary of State has designated Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act, for its particularly egregious violations of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 631,000 square miles, and according to the Government's 2006 census, a population of 70 million. The population is 98 percent Muslim; 89 percent is Shi'a and 9 percent Sunni (mostly Turkmen and Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest respectively). Non-Muslims account for 2 percent of the population. There are no official statistics available on the size of the Sufi Muslim population; however, some reports estimate between two and five million people practice Sufism.

Recent unofficial estimates from religious organizations claim that Bahá'ís, Jews, Christians, Sabean-Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians constitute 2 percent of the total population. The largest non-Muslim minority is the Bahá'í religious group, which numbers 300,000 to 350,000. Unofficial estimates of the size of the Jewish community vary from 25,000 to 30,000.

According to U.N. figures, 300,000 Christians live in the country, the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians. There are Protestant denominations, including evangelical religious groups. Christian groups outside the country estimate the size of the Protestant Christian community to be less than 10,000, although many Protestant Christians reportedly practice in secret. Unofficial estimates for the Assyrian Christian population are between 10,000 and 20,000. Sabean-Mandaeans number 5,000 to 10,000 persons. The Government regards the Sabean-Mandaeans as Christians, and they are included among the three recognized religious minorities; however, Sabean-Mandaeans do not regard themselves as Christians. There are indications that members of all religious minorities are emigrating at a high rate, al-

though it is unclear if the reasons for emigration are religious or related to overall poor economic conditions. The Government estimates there are 30,000 to 35,000 Zoroastrians, a primarily ethnic Persian minority; however, Zoroastrian groups claim to have 60,000 adherents.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'afari (Twelver) Shi'ism." All laws and regulations must be consistent with the official interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law). The Government severely restricts freedom of religion. The Constitution states that "within the limits of the law," Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities who are guaranteed freedom to practice their religion; however, members of these recognized minority religious groups have reported Government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, heads a tricameral structure of Government (legislative, executive, and judicial branches). The Supreme Leader is not directly elected, but chosen by a group of 86 Islamic scholars (the Assembly of Experts), who are directly elected. All acts of the Majlis (parliament) must be reviewed for strict conformity with Islamic law and the Constitution by the Council of Guardians, which is composed of six clerics, appointed by the Supreme Leader and six Muslim jurists (legal scholars), nominated by the head of the judiciary and approved by the Majlis. The Council of Guardians also screens presidential and Majlis candidates for eligibility. The Supreme Leader is also advised by the Expediency Council, which has the authority to mediate disputes between the Majlis and the Council of Guardians. The president is directly elected every 4 years. Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad won the presidency in June 2005.

The Government does not respect the right of Muslim citizens to change or renounce their religious faith.

Non-Muslims may not engage in public religious expression and persuasion among Muslims, and there are restrictions on published religious material.

A child born to a Muslim father automatically is considered a Muslim.

Apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, is punishable by death, although there were no reported cases of the death penalty being applied for apostasy during the reporting period. Proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims is illegal. 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.

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, although members of religious minorities could serve in lower ranks of Government employment, with the exception of Bahá'ís. 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, apart from Bahá'ís, who are not permitted to serve in the military. The law forbids non-Muslims from holding officer positions over Muslims in the armed forces. Members of religious minorities with a college education can serve as officers during their mandatory military service but cannot be career military officers. The Constitution provides Sunni Muslims a large degree of religious freedom.

By law, religious minorities are not allowed to be elected to a representative body or to hold senior Government or military positions, with the exception that 5 of a total 290 seats in the Majlis are reserved for religious minorities. Three of these seats are reserved for members of Christian religious groups, including two seats for the country's Armenian Christians, and one for Assyrian Christians. There is also one seat to represent Jewish Iranians, and one to represent Iranian Zoroastrians. While Sunnis do not have reserved seats in the Majlis, they are allowed to serve in the body. Sunni Majlis deputies tend to be elected from among the larger Sunni communities. Members of religious minorities are allowed to vote; however, all minority religious groups, including Sunni Muslims, are barred from being elected president.

The legal system discriminates against religious minorities. Article 297 of the amended 1991 Islamic Punishments Act authorizes collection of equal "blood money" (diyeh) as restitution to the families for the death of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Prior to the 2004 change, the law gave a lesser monetary amount as "blood money" for non-Muslims than for Muslims. All women, as well as Bahá'í and

Sabean-Mandaean men, are excluded from the equalization provisions of the bill. Restitution for the death of a woman is half that of a man. According to law, Bahá'í blood is considered mobah, meaning it can be spilled with impunity.

Adherents of religious groups not recognized by the Constitution, such as the Bahá'ís, do not have freedom to practice their beliefs. Government officials have stated that, as individuals, all Bahá'ís are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under the articles of the Constitution as citizens; however, the Government continues to prohibit Bahá'ís from teaching and practicing their faith. Bahá'ís are barred from Government and military posts.

The Government considers Bahá'ís to be apostates and defines the Bahá'í faith as a political "sect." The Ministry of Justice states that Bahá'ís are permitted to enroll in schools only if they do not identify themselves as Bahá'ís, and that Bahá'ís preferably should be enrolled in schools with a strong and imposing religious ideology. There were allegations that Bahá'í children in public schools faced attempts to convert them to Islam. After a brief policy change during the reporting period allowed Bahá'í students to enroll in universities, the Government reverted to its previous practice of requiring Bahá'í students to identify themselves as other than Bahá'í in order to register for the entrance examination. This action precluded Bahá'í enrollment in state-run universities, since a tenet of the Bahá'í religion is not to deny one's faith. The Ministry of Justice states that Bahá'ís must be excluded or expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, if their religious affiliation becomes known. University applicants are required to pass an examination in Islamic, Christian, or Jewish theology, but there was no test for the Bahá'í faith.

Bahá'ís are banned from the social pension system. In addition, Bahá'ís are regularly denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization and are denied the right to inherit property. Bahá'í marriages and divorces are not officially recognized, although the Government allows a civil attestation of marriage to serve as a marriage certificate.

The Government allows recognized religious minorities to establish community centers and certain self-financed cultural, social, athletic, or charitable associations. However, the Government prohibited the Bahá'í community from official assembly and from maintaining administrative institutions by closing any such institutions.

The Government propagated a legal interpretation of Islam that effectively deprived women of many rights granted to men. Gender segregation was enforced, generally throughout the country, without regard to religious affiliation. Women of all religious groups are expected to adhere to Islamic dress in public. Although enforcement of rules for conservative Islamic dress eased in previous years, the Government periodically cracks down on "un-Islamic dress," particularly during the summer months. The crackdowns on "un-Islamic dress" during the reporting period were much harsher than in recent years. The Government's 12-point contract model for marriage and divorce limits the rights accorded to women by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to severe restrictions on religious freedom. All non-Shi'a religious minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance (Ershad) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) monitor religious activity closely. Members of recognized religious minorities are not required to register with the Government, and religion is not noted on national identity cards; however, their communal, religious, and cultural events and organizations, including schools, are monitored closely. Registration of Bahá'ís is a police function. The Government required evangelical Christian groups to compile and submit membership lists for their congregations.

The Government generally allowed recognized religious minorities to conduct religious education for their adherents in separate schools, although it restricted this right considerably in some cases. The Ministry of Education, which imposed certain curriculum requirements, supervised these schools. With few exceptions, the directors of such private schools must be Muslim. Attendance at the schools was not mandatory for recognized religious minorities. The Ministry of Education must approve all textbooks used in coursework, including religious texts. Recognized religious minorities could provide religious instruction in non-Persian languages, but such texts required approval by the authorities. This approval requirement sometimes imposed significant translation expenses on minority communities. However, Assyrian Christians reported that their community was permitted to write its own

textbooks, which, following Government authorization, were then printed at Government expense and distributed to the Assyrian community.

On December 19, 2006, the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran. The resolution follows similar U.N. statements since 2001 that decry the Government's harsh treatment of non-Shi'a Muslims. In March 2006 the U.N. General Assembly adopted Resolution 60/171 expressing serious concern about the continued discrimination and human rights violations against religious minorities by the Government. Also, in March 2006 the U.N. Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on Freedom of Religion or Belief issued a statement of concern about the treatment of the Bahá'í community in the country.

During the reporting period, many Sunnis claimed that the Government discriminated against them. It was difficult to distinguish whether the cause of discrimination was religious or ethnic, since most Sunnis are also members of ethnic minorities. Sunnis cited the absence of a Sunni mosque in Tehran, despite the presence of more than one million adherents there, as a prominent example. Sunni leaders reported bans on Sunni religious literature and teachings in public schools, even in predominantly Sunni areas. Sunnis also claimed there was a lack of Sunni representation in Government-appointed positions in the provinces where they form a majority, such as Kurdistan and Khuzestan Province, as well as their inability to obtain senior governmental positions. In addition, Sunnis charged that the Government-owned Broadcast Corporation's program, *Voice and Vision*, airs programming which is insulting to them.

Sunni Majlis representatives assert that Government discrimination led to the lack of Sunni presence in the executive and judicial branches, especially in higher-ranking positions in Embassies, universities, and other institutions, as well as anti-Sunni propaganda in the mass media, books, and publications.

Broad restrictions on Bahá'ís severely undermined their ability to function as a community. The Government repeatedly offers Bahá'ís relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith.

Bahá'ís may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with coreligionists abroad. Bahá'ís are often officially charged with "espionage on behalf of Zionism," in part due to the fact that the Bahá'í world headquarters is located in Israel. These charges are more acute when Bahá'ís are caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Bahá'í headquarters.

Since late 2005 Bahá'ís have faced an increasing number of public attacks, including a series of negative and defamatory articles in *Kayhan*, a Government-affiliated newspaper whose managing editor was appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i. Radio and television broadcasts have also increasingly condemned the Bahá'ís and their religion, and since October 2005 state-owned media has launched a series of weekly anti-Bahá'í broadcasts. These reports had the intention of arousing suspicion, distrust, and hatred for the Bahá'í community.

Public and private universities continued either to deny admittance to or expel Bahá'í students. In 2004 Bahá'í applicants took part in the nationwide exam for entrance into state-run universities; however, "Islam" was pre-printed as a prospective student's religious affiliation on the form authorizing their matriculation. This action precluded Bahá'í enrollment, since a tenet of the Bahá'í religion is not to deny one's faith. During the reporting period, Government officials reportedly stated that "Islam" printed on the authorization form did not reflect the student's religion, but the religion about which the student was tested. After taking part in the nationwide entrance examination, more than 175 Bahá'í students reportedly enrolled in universities during the reporting period, but close to half of those students were expelled once their religious affiliation became known. Toward the end of the reporting period, the Government reverted to the previous practice of requiring Bahá'í students to identify themselves as other than Bahá'í to register for the entrance examination.

The Government monitored the activities of Bahá'ís. A Bahá'í group outside the country reported an August 19, 2006, letter from the Ministry of Interior requesting provincial offices to "cautiously and carefully monitor and manage" all Bahá'í social activities.

The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief reported the existence of a secret October 2005 letter written by the Chairman of the Armed Forces Command, Major General Seyyed Hossein Firuzabadi, acting on instructions from Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, to the Ministry of Information, the Revolutionary Guard, and the Police Force, which requested the agencies to collect and to provide to the Armed Forces Command all information about Bahá'ís.

There were reports the Association of Chambers of Commerce and related associations, which are nominally independent bodies that are nonetheless heavily influenced by the Government, compiled a list of Bahá'ís and their trades and employment. A May 2006 letter from the Trades, Production, and Technical Services Soci-

ety of Kermanshah to the Union of Battery Manufacturers showed further evidence of workplace restrictions as it asked the union to compile "a list of the names of those who belong to the Bahá'í sect and are under the jurisdiction of your union."

The Government promoted and condoned anti-Semitism in state-media and hosted a Holocaust denial conference during the reporting period. However, with some exceptions, there was little Government restriction of, or interference with, Jewish religious practice. Nevertheless, education of Jewish children has become more difficult in recent years. The Government reportedly allowed Hebrew instruction, recognizing that it was necessary for Jewish religious practice. However, it limited the distribution of Hebrew texts, in practice making it difficult to teach the language. Moreover, the Government required that in conformity with the schedule of other schools, several Jewish schools must remain open on Saturdays, which violates Jewish law.

Jewish citizens are permitted to obtain passports and travel outside the country. In contrast with past reporting years, Jewish groups reported that Iranian Jews are now issued the multiple-exit permits issued to other citizens, and other travel restrictions have eased. Jewish groups outside the country reported unsuccessful Government attempts to interfere in the elections of the Jewish Central Committee (JCC), which appoints the head of the Jewish community in the country. The groups also reported that the Jewish community's newspaper, *Ofogh-e-Bina*, stopped publication, reportedly due largely to Government pressure on the previous chair of the JCC.

The small Sabean-Mandaean religious community reportedly faced intensifying harassment and repression by authorities, including reported Government closings of Sabean-Mandaean places of worship (Mandi). There were also reports of religious freedom violations, such as forced observance of Islamic fasting rituals and praying in an Islamic fashion, which are in violation of Sabean-Mandaean teachings.

Sufis within the country and Sufi organizations outside the country remained extremely concerned about growing Government repression of their communities and religious practices, including increased harassment and intimidation of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services. Government restrictions on Sufi groups and houses of worship (husseiniya) became more pronounced in recent years.

Reportedly, the President called for an end to the development of Christianity in the country. Christian groups outside the country reported the growth of underground churches in the country during the reporting period.

The Government carefully monitors the statements and views of senior Shi'a religious leaders. The Special Clerical Courts, established to investigate offenses and crimes committed by clerics, and which the Supreme Leader oversees directly, are not provided for in the Constitution and operate outside the judiciary. In particular, critics alleged that the clerical courts are used to prosecute certain clerics for expressing controversial ideas and for participating in nonreligious activities, including journalism.

Non-Shi'a religious leaders reported abuse, including detentions and torture of Sunni clerics, as well as other widespread restrictions on their ability to practice their faith. They also reported bans on Sunni teachings in public schools and Sunni religious literature. Residents of provinces with large Sunni populations, including Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and Sistan-va-Baluchestan, reported discrimination and lack of resources, but it was difficult to determine what was ethnic-based discrimination and what was religious-based.

Laws based on religion have been used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines have been closed, and leading publishers and journalists have been imprisoned on vague charges of "insulting Islam" or "calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic."

Many female Muslims sought to eliminate laws and practices that discriminate against women, arguing that relegating women to a lesser status due to, inter alia, their being considered "deficient in reason," was not a precept of Islam, but rather a non-Islamic accretion to Islamic practices.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, since 1979 more than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed, and 15 have disappeared and are presumed dead.

The Government seized many Bahá'í properties following the 1979 revolution and has not returned any Bahá'í cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, or other assets. No properties have been returned, and many have been destroyed. Bahá'ís are generally prevented from burying and honoring their dead in accordance with their religious tradition; however, Bahá'í groups reported some in-

stances during the reporting period of Bahá'ís being permitted to bury their dead in their own cemeteries.

The property rights of Bahá'ís are generally disregarded, and they suffer frequent Government harassment and persecution. The Government has confiscated large numbers of private and business properties belonging to Bahá'ís, as well as religious material. The Government reportedly seized numerous Bahá'í homes and handed them over to an agency of Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Sources indicated that property was confiscated in Rafsanjan, Kerman, Marv-Dasht, Yazd, and Kata Provinces. The Government also seized private homes in which Bahá'í youth classes were held, despite the owners having proper ownership documents.

The Bahá'í community claimed the Government's seizure of Bahá'í personal property and its denial of Bahá'í access to education and employment was eroding the economic base of the community and threatening its survival. On June 29, 2006, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on adequate housing found that Government expropriations of property in Iran "seem to have targeted disproportionately" the property of Bahá'ís and other ethnic and religious minorities. He further mentioned that many of the confiscation verdicts made by Iranian Revolutionary Courts declared that "the confiscation of the property of the evil sect of the Bahá'í [were] legally and religiously justifiable." There were reports during the reporting period of authorities forcing Bahá'í businesses to close and placing restrictions on their businesses, and asking managers of private companies to dismiss their Bahá'í employees.

The Government continued to imprison and detain Bahá'ís based on their religious beliefs. The Government arbitrarily arrested Bahá'ís and charged them with violating Islamic Penal Code Articles 500 and 698, relating to activities against the state and spreading falsehoods, respectively. Often the charges were not dropped upon release and those with charges still pending against them reportedly feared rearrest at any time. Most were released only after paying large fines or posting high bails.

Between May 2006 and January 2007, the Government reportedly arrested 63 Bahá'ís. As of February 2007 three remained in prison. The Government never formally charged many of the others, but released them only after they posted bail. For some, bail was in the form of deeds of property; others gained their release in exchange for personal guarantees or work licenses.

There were also reports of attacks on Bahá'ís by unidentified assailants, including the killings of two elderly Bahá'í women. On February 16, 2007, an 85-year-old Bahá'í woman, Behnam Saltanat Akhzari, was killed in her home by a masked intruder. The following day, a 77-year-old Bahá'í woman, Shah Beygom Dehghani, was also assaulted in her home by a masked intruder and she died on March 7, 2007.

On January 1, 2007, two Bahá'í men, Riaz Heravi and Siamak Ebrahimi, were arrested and detained for 20 and 30 days, respectively. No details were available about the reasons for their arrests, although a Bahá'í group noted that the two coordinated events for their Bahá'í community on an ad hoc basis.

On November 1, 2006, a Bahá'í man, Fayzullah Rowshan, was reportedly arrested by order of the Ministry of Information, following a search of his home. He was released on January 1, 2007. No details about the reason for his arrest were available.

On September 21, 2006, the Court of Appeal in Semnan province denied the appeal of eight Bahá'ís arrested in May 2005. They were accused of "teaching activities against the Islamic Republic of Iran." Three were given sentences of 6 months in prison, and five were sentenced to 91 days. Six of the eight sentences were suspended for 4 years, and the other two appealed their sentences.

On August 17, 2006, a Bahá'í man, Babak Roohi, was reportedly arrested in Mashhad for making 50 photocopies of a Bahá'í book for a Bahá'í function. He was released 2 weeks later after posting bail of $34,000 (315,000,000 rials).

On June 28, 2006, a Bahá'í was taken into custody and was being held in the Ministry of Information's detention center. At the end of the reporting period, no further information was available. This individual was previously arrested and released in August 2005.

On June 21, 2006, a Bahá'í man, Shokrollah Rahmani, was reportedly abducted in broad daylight in Khash, in southeastern Iran. His family reported that the police refused to investigate, despite being presented with evidence, including telephone and license plate numbers. Rahmani was released on November 24, 2006. No further details were available.

On June 21, 2006, a Bahá'í from Baluchistan province was reportedly abducted, and authorities said they suspected criminal elements were involved.

On June 18, 2006, the Government arrested three Bahá'ís from Hamadan after Government officials confiscated books, computers, and Bahá'í documents. They were later released on bail on June 21, 2006.

Between May 9 and May 11, 2006, the Government raided eleven Bahá'í homes in Shahinshahr, Najafabad, and Kashan with no arrests made. On May 19, 2006, the Government raided six Bahá'í homes in Shiraz, and arrested 54 Bahá'ís. Security forces also seized notebooks, computers, books, and documents. On May 24 and May 25, 2006, the Government released all but three of the detainees. As of June 14, 2006 the remaining three had been released.

On March 18, 2006, Mehran Kawsari was released from jail without bail, after being charged with taking measures against the internal security of the Government. He was tried in connection with distributing a November 2004 open letter, in which the Bahá'í community wrote to the Government of the Islamic Republic, addressed to then-President Khatami, seeking an end to Bahá'í-focused human rights and religious freedom abuses. Numerous anecdotal reports indicated a marked increase in Government persecution of Bahá'ís after this letter.

On February 5, 2006, the Government arrested three Bahá'ís from Esfahan for coordinating Bahá'í activities.

On January 15, 2006, the Government arrested three Bahá'ís from Kermanshah on charges of "involvement in Bahá'í activities and insulting Islam." The Government raided their homes and the homes of four others the same day and confiscated books, documents, and other items. The Government released them on January 20, 2006.

On December 19, 2005, the longest imprisoned Bahá'í, Zabihullah Mahrami, died in prison of unknown causes. He was arrested in 1995 and convicted of apostasy in 1996. A Bahá'í group outside the country reported in April 2007 that the Revolutionary Court of Yazd province confiscated the home of Mahrami's widow, Nahid Beygi.

In August 2005 the Government arrested at least 23 Bahá'ís and later released 3 on bail and sentenced 4 to 10 months in prison. The Government also searched the homes of several Bahá'ís, and confiscated books, computers, tapes, videos, and CDs.

In May 2005 the Government charged several Bahá'ís with "creating anxiety in the minds of the public and those of the Iranian officials" and distributing "propaganda against the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran," for having distributed copies of the 2004 open letter to various Government officials.

In April–May 2005 the Government arrested and imprisoned nine Bahá'ís, following the confiscation of their properties. All nine later gained their release from prison, after a business license was used as collateral.

In March 2005 a series of Bahá'í arrests and imprisonments took place throughout the country. One of the Bahá'ís previously arrested and briefly detained for having distributed an open letter from the Bahá'í community to then-President Khatami, received a 3-year sentence and was incarcerated in Evin prison.

In February 2005 the Government released two Bahá'ís from prison after serving almost 15 years on charges related to their religious beliefs.

In January 2005 several Bahá'ís were assaulted in their homes by unidentified assailants and later summoned, questioned, and released by the authorities.

Sufi Muslims faced an increasing repression campaign.

On May 21, 2007, security forces arrested the leader of the Nematollahi Gonabadi Sufi order, Nurali Tabandeh. The reason for his arrest and whether formal charges have been brought against him were not known.

On May 4, 2006, a court sentenced 52 Sufis to jail on various charges in connection with a February 14, 2006 incident, in which the Government reportedly arrested more than 1,200 Sufis for gathering illegally. The Government sentenced the defendants and their two lawyers to a year in prison, fines, and 74 lashes, which was later reduced to fines only. The Government also banned the lawyers, Farshid Yadollahi and Omid Behrouzi, from practicing law for 5 years.

Articles attacking Sufis are printed in Government-controlled, national newspapers, such as *Jomhouri-ye Eslami* and *Kayhan*. On February 14, 2006, a *Kayhan* article quoted senior clerics in Qom as saying that Sufism should be eradicated in the city. Several anti-Sufi books were reportedly published in recent years.

On February 14, 2006, security forces demolished a husseiniya, as well as neighboring houses, and arrested more than 1,200 persons, according to several sources. Other sources close to the Sufi groups and human rights activists reported up to 2,000 arrests. The Government detained at least 173 people at Fajr prison and reportedly tortured them, to extract confessions that would be read on national television. Those released had to sign agreements saying they would not attend Sufi gatherings in Qom and would present themselves to intelligence offices. Reportedly, the Government required some to sign documents renouncing Sufism.

On February 13, 2006, the day preceding the February 14, 2006, incident, police officers tried to close a husseiniya in the city of Qom, sparking 2 days of clashes

and violence. Qom officials stated the Sufis had illegally turned a residential building into a religious establishment. However, the establishment apparently had been built 3 years ago with municipal permission. According to some human rights groups, the Sufis, including many women and children, peacefully protested the order to leave the husseiniya. Police attacked the Sufis in the building with tear gas and explosives, causing more than 500 hospitalizations, according to some sources, and 100 injuries, according to the Qom Governor, General Abbas Mohtaj. Members of the Fatemiyon and Hojjatiyeh groups, conservative Islamic groups, reportedly joined the police in first taunting the protestors and then attacking and beating them.

In September 2005, Ayatollah Hossein Nouri-Hamedani, as Islamic scholar in Qom, reportedly called for a crackdown on Sufi groups, labeling them a "danger to Islam." Five months later an attack occurred that involved police and paramilitary forces. During the riots, the paramilitaries distributed leaflets calling Sufis enemies of Islam, and the Qom governor accused the Sufis of having ties to foreign countries and creating instability.

Christians—particularly evangelicals—continued to be subject to harassment and close surveillance. During the reporting period, the Government vigilantly enforced its prohibition on proselytizing by evangelical Christians by closely monitoring their activities, discouraging Muslims from entering church premises, closing their churches, and arresting Christian converts. Members of evangelical congregations are 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 restricted meetings for evangelical services to Sundays, and church officials are ordered to inform the Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance before admitting new members.

On September 26, 2006, authorities arrested evangelical Christians Fereshteh Dibaj and Reza Montazami at their home in the northeastern part of the country. Dibaj and Montazami operated an independent church in Mashhad. The Information Ministry held the couple for 10 days without bringing any charges, and agents confiscated their home computer and other belongings. They were released on October 5, 2006.

On July 24, 2006, authorities arrested Issa Motamedi Mojdehi, a Muslim convert to Christianity, following his attempt to register the birth of his son. Charges of drug trafficking were brought against him, which Christian groups said was an attempt to punish him for his conversion.

On May 2, 2006, a Muslim convert to Christianity, Ali Kaboli, was taken into custody in Gorgan, after several years of police surveillance, and threatened with prosecution if he did not leave the country. He was interrogated and was held incommunicado before being released on June 12, 2006.

On November 22, 2005, a Muslim convert to Christianity, Ghorban Tori, was kidnapped from his house in the northeast and killed. His body was later returned to his house. Tori was a pastor at an independent house church of converted Christians. After the killing, security officials searched his house for Bibles and banned Christian books in Persian. In the previous week, according to some sources, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security arrested and tortured 10 Christians in several cities.

In 2004 sources reported the arrest of several dozen evangelical Christians in the north, including a Christian pastor, his wife, and their two teenage children in Chalous, Mazandaran Province. The Government released many of those arrested, including the pastor and his family, after 6 weeks in detention.

In 2004 security officials raided the annual general conference of the country's Assemblies of God Church, arresting approximately 80 religious leaders gathered at the church's denominational center in Karaj. Assemblies of God Pastor Hamid Pourmand, a former Muslim who converted to Christianity nearly 25 years ago and who led a congregation in Bushehr, was the only detainee not released. In late January 2005 he was tried in a military court on charges of espionage, and on February 16, 2005, he was found guilty and sentenced to 3 years. Pourmand, who was a noncommissioned officer, was discharged from the army and forfeited his entire income, pension, and housing for his family. A Web site documenting persecution of Christians reported that Pourmand was released on July 20, 2006.

The Government was allegedly responsible for the killing of Sunni clerics in recent years. Sunni leaders reported abuses, including detentions and torture of Sunni clerics, and an unconfirmed report of a suspicious death of a Sunni cleric who had defied orders not to return to the mosque after his release from prison.

There were reports of three killings of senior clerics during 2007, including the June 24, 2007 killing of Hesham Saymary, in the ethnically-Arab dominated prov-

ince of Khuzestan. It is not known whether the Government had any role in those killings.

Anti-Semitism

While the Government recognizes Judaism as a religious minority, Jews alleged frequent official discrimination. During the reporting period, there was a rise in officially sanctioned, anti-Semitic propaganda, involving official statements, media outlets, publications, and books. The Government's anti-Israel policies and anti-Semitic rhetoric, along with a perception among radical Muslims that all Jewish citizens of the country support Zionism and the state of Israel, created a hostile atmosphere for Jews. The rhetorical attacks also further blurred the line between Zionism, Judaism, and Israel and contributed to increased concerns about the future security of the Jewish community.

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 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. In 2005 many newspapers celebrated the 100th anniversary of the anti-Semitic publication *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Jewish community members continued to emigrate, in part due to continued anti-Semitism on the part of the Government and within society.

Jewish groups reported that two synagogues in the country were assaulted during the reporting period, largely because a hard-line newspaper, *Yalesarat*, published two photos of synagogues displaying Israeli flags and falsely claimed that the synagogues were in the country.

Since August 2005 President Ahmadi-Nejad has pursued a virulent anti-Israel campaign, including commenting on the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah as triggering the countdown for the "destruction of the Zionist regime." President Ahmadi-Nejad also publicly questioned the existence or the scale of the Holocaust, which created an even more hostile environment for the Jewish minority. Friday prayer leaders endorsed the President's Holocaust denial statements and reported the statements are "the heartfelt words of all Muslims in the world."

On December 11 and 12, 2006, the Government sponsored a conference entitled, "Review of the Holocaust: Global Vision." This conference was widely criticized as it provided a forum for those who deny the existence or scale of the Holocaust. Speakers at the conference universally called for the elimination or delegitimization of the state of Israel and concluded that the Holocaust did not occur or that the scale of the Holocaust was exaggerated by Jews for political or financial gain.

In mid 2006 the newspaper *Hamshahri* cosponsored a Holocaust cartoon contest, soliciting submissions from around the world and awarding a $12,000 (111,000,000 rials) prize to a Moroccan cartoonist who drew a picture of an Israeli crane erecting a wall of concrete blocks around the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, Islam's third holiest site. The blocks bear sections of a photograph of the Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Government sponsored an exhibit of these cartoons in Tehran on August 14, 2006.

Jewish community leaders protested the President's Holocaust denial comments and the Holocaust cartoon contest. The sole Jewish Majlis deputy, Moris Motamed, condemned the President's remarks on the Holocaust, saying in a September 22, 2006, BBC news article, "It is very regrettable to see a horrible tragedy so far reaching as the Holocaust being denied . . . it was a very big insult to Jews all around the world."

Within the domestic press, anti-Semitism in the media was present, and anti-Semitic editorial cartoons depicting demonic and stereotypical images of Jews, along with Jewish symbols, were published during the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversions

There are 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.

Government officials reportedly offered Bahá'ís relief from mistreatment, in exchange for recanting their faith, and if incarcerated, recanting their faith as a precondition for releasing them.

Authorities reportedly forced several Sufi Muslims to sign forced renunciations of their faith while in prison, following the February 2006 riots.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The continuous presence of the country's pre-Islamic, non-Muslim communities, such as Zoroastrians, Jews, Sabean-Mandaeans, and Christians, accustomed the

population to the participation of non-Muslims in society; however, Government actions continued to support elements of society who create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities. The President's new agenda stressed the importance of Islam in enhancing "national solidarity" and mandated that Government-controlled media emphasize Islamic culture in order to "cause subcultures to adapt themselves to public culture." The Supreme Leader named March 2007 to March 2008 the year of "national unity and Islamic solidarity." Since President Ahmadi-Nejad took office in August 2005, conservative media have intensified a campaign against non-Muslim religious minorities, and political and religious leaders issued a continual stream of inflammatory statements. The campaigns against non-Muslims contributed to a significantly worse situation for non-Muslim society throughout the reporting period.

Sunni Muslims and Christians encountered societal and religious discrimination and harassment at the local, provincial, and national levels.

Bahá'ís faced Government-sanctioned discrimination in the workplace. Bahá'í graveyards in Yazd and other cities were desecrated, and the Government did not seek to identify or punish the perpetrators.

Since the National Association of Chambers of Commerce began collecting employment data on Bahá'ís, there were reported problems for Bahá'ís in different trades around the country. Bahá'ís experienced an escalation of personal harassment, including receiving threatening notes, CDs, text messages, and tracts. There were reported cases of Bahá'í children being harassed in school and subjected to Islamic indoctrination. Bahá'í girls were especially targeted by students and educators, with the intention of creating tension between parents and children.

There was concern from several groups about the rumored resurgence of the banned Hojjatiyeh Society, a secretive religious-economic group that was founded in 1953 to rid the country of the Bahá'í faith, in order to hasten the return of the 12th Imam (the Mahdi). Although not a Government organization, it was believed that many members of the administration were Hojjatiyeh members and were using their offices to advance the society's goals. However, it was unknown what role, if any, the group played in the arrests of numerous Bahá'ís during the reporting period. Many Bahá'í human rights groups and news agencies described the goals of the Hojjatiyeh Society as the eradication of the Bahá'ís, not just the Bahá'í faith. The group's anti-Bahá'í orientation reportedly widened to encompass anti-Sunni and anti-Sufi activities as well.

Religious minorities are allowed to handle food and own food businesses, but most Muslim conservatives will not eat food prepared by Jews.

The small Sabean-Mandaean community reportedly faced discrimination similar to that faced by other religious minorities. There were reports that members of the Sabean-Mandaean community experienced societal discrimination and pressure to convert to Islam and were often denied access to higher education.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States has no diplomatic relations with the country, and thus it does not raise directly with the Government the restrictions that the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses the Government commits against adherents of minority religious groups.

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. The U.S. Government calls on other countries with bilateral relations with Iran to use those ties to press its Government on religious freedom and human rights.

On numerous occasions, the U.S. State Department spokesman has addressed the situation of the Bahá'í and Jewish communities in the country. The U.S. Government has publicly condemned the treatment of the Bahá'ís in U.N. resolutions, including one that passed in the General Assembly in 2006. The U.S. Government has encouraged other Governments to make similar statements.

IRAQ

Iraq is a constitutional democracy with a republican, Federal, pluralistic system of Government, consisting of 18 provinces or "governorates." Although the Constitution recognizes Islam as the official religion and states that no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam, it also guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice.

While the Government generally endorsed these rights, unsettled conditions prevented effective governance in parts of the country, and the Government's ability to protect religious freedoms was handicapped by insurgency, terrorism, and sectarian violence.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom demonstrated by the Government during the period covered by this report. Since 2003, the Government has generally not engaged in the persecution of any religious group, calling instead for tolerance and acceptance of all religious minorities. However, some Government institutions continued their long-standing discriminatory practices against the Baha'i and Wahhabi Sunni Muslims.

Radical Islamic elements continued to exert tremendous pressure on other groups to conform to extremist interpretations of Islam's precepts. In addition, frequent sectarian violence, including attacks on religious places of worship, hampered the ability to practice religion freely. This sectarian violence was heightened by the February 22, 2006, attack on the al-Askariya Mosque in Samarra, one of the most significant Shi'a mosques in the world, containing the mausoleums of the 10th and 11th imams.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom problems with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Senior U.S. administration and Embassy officials called for unity in the face of sectarian violence and supported the inclusion of religious minorities in the political process.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Due to increased violence, internal population migration, and lack of Government capacity, statistics from different sources varied. Numbers are often estimates from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than census data or other official sources. Official statistics are noted where applicable.

The country has an area of 437,072 square miles and a population of 27.5 million. Ninety-seven percent of the population is Muslim. Shi'a Muslims—predominantly Arabs, but also including Turkmen, Faili Kurds, and other groups—constitute a 60 to 65 percent majority. Sunni Muslims make up 32 to 37 percent of the population, of whom 18 to 20 percent are Sunni Kurds, 12 to 16 percent Sunni Arabs, and the remainder are Sunni Turkmen. The remaining 3 percent is comprised of Chaldeans (an eastern rite of the Catholic Church), Assyrians (Church of the East), Syriacs (Eastern Orthodox), Armenians (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox), and Protestant Christians, as well as Yezidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, Baha'is, Shabaks, and Kaka'is (a small, syncretic religious group located in and around Kirkuk). Shi'a, although predominantly located in the south, are also a majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the center and the north of the country.

According to the official 1987 census, there were 1.4 million Christians living in the country. Current estimates place the number of Christians at fewer than 1 million, with Chaldeans comprising the majority. In August 2006, Chaldean Auxiliary Bishop Andreos Abouna of Baghdad stated that of the estimated 1.2 million Christians living in the country before the 2003 invasion, only 600,000 remained. According to church leaders, an estimated 30 percent of the country's Christian population lives in the north, with the largest Christian communities located in Mosul, Erbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk.

The Primate of the Armenian Diocese reported that 19,000 Armenian Christians remained in the country, primarily in the cities of Baghdad, Basrah, Kirkuk, and Mosul. The population of Armenian Christians reportedly declined from 22,000 in the previous reporting period.

Yezidi leaders reported that most of the country's 600,000 Yezidi resided in the north, near Dohuk and Mosul. Shabak leaders stated that the country's estimated 200,000 Shabaks resided mainly in the north, near Mosul.

The Sabean-Mandaean community continued to decline; according to Sabean-Mandaean leaders, 5,000 to 7,000 remained in the country, down from 10,000 in the previous reporting period. The Kaka'i, sometimes referred to as Ahl-e Haqq, resided primarily in Kirkuk, Mosul, and Kankeen in the Diyala Province. Most are ethnic Kurds.

There was no data available on active participation in religious services or rituals; however, terrorist attacks rendered many mosques, churches, and other holy sites unusable. Many worshippers reportedly did not attend religious services or participate in religious events because of the threat of violence. There were numerous reports of places of worship closing due to those threats.

The Government provided significant support for the Hajj by organizing travel routes and assisting pilgrims with obtaining immunization paperwork for entry to

Saudi Arabia. The Government also provided funding to Sunni and Shi'a waqfs, or religious endowments, which accepted Hajj applications from the public and submitted them to the Supreme Council for the Hajj. The Council, attached to the Prime Minister's office, organized the lottery process that selected pilgrims for official Hajj visas from among the submitted applications.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally endorsed this right. However, other legal provisions place limits on this freedom.

Article 10 of the Constitution establishes the state's commitment to assuring and maintaining the sanctity of holy shrines and religious sites and to guaranteeing the free practice of rituals in them. Article 43 of the Constitution states that the followers of all religious groups and sects are free in the practice of religious rites and in the management of religious endowments, their affairs, and their religious institutions. The second clause of Article 43 reiterates this by explicitly guaranteeing the freedom of worship and the protection of places of worship.

It is the Government's policy to protect the right of all religious groups to gather and worship freely; however, in practice, the ongoing insurgency impeded the ability of many citizens to exercise this right.

Although the Constitution generally provides for religious freedom, it is heavily focused on the nation's Islamic identity. Article 2 of the Constitution, which recognizes Islam as the country's official religion, mandates that Islam be considered a source of legislation and states that no law can be enacted that contradicts the faith's universally agreed-upon tenets.

The second clause of Article 2, however, stipulates that no law can be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy or basic freedoms, which include the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice. Article 14 of the Constitution establishes that citizens are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, color, religion, sect, belief, opinion, or economic or social status. Article 41 provides that citizens are free in their commitments to their personal status according to their religious groups, sects, beliefs, or choices.

The Government maintains three *waqfs*, or religious endowments, the Sunni, Shi'a, and Christian and Other Religions Endowments, that were formed when the Ministry for Religious Affairs was dissolved under the Coalition Provisional Authority in August 2003. The endowments, which operate under the authority of the Prime Minister's office, receive Government funding to maintain religious facilities.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In most areas of the country, the curriculum of both primary and secondary public schools includes three class periods per week of Islamic Education, including study of the Qur'an, as a requirement for graduation. Religious study is not mandatory in the north. Non-Muslim students throughout the country are not officially required to participate in Islamic studies; however, some non-Muslim students reported that they felt pressure to do so. During the reporting period, there were no private primary or secondary schools operating with approval of the Government.

Many Muslim holy days are also national holidays, including Ashura, Arbai'n, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Maulid al-Nabi (the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad). Nawruz (Spring Day), a national holiday, is celebrated as a religious holiday by Baha'is. Christians reported that although Christmas and Easter are not national holidays, Government policy recognizes their right to observe both holidays.

Under the country's civil law, there is no penalty for conversion. Under Islamic law, conversion from Islam to another religion is a capital offense. Article 1 of the Penal Code No. 111 of 1969, however, mandates that criminal penalties can be imposed only by civil law. Despite the Shari'a punishment for conversion, the penal code does not import the Shari'a penalty, nor does it contain a similar penalty. The Law of Civil Affairs No. 65 of 1972 explicitly allows non-Muslims to convert to Islam. The Constitution provides that citizens are to be free in their commitment to their personal status according to their religious groups, sects, beliefs, or choices, as regulated by law.

Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) Resolution 201 of 2001 prohibits the Wahhabi branch of Islam and mandates the death penalty for adherents if the charge is proved. Law No. 105 of 1970 prohibits the Baha'i faith. While provisions on freedom of religion in the new Constitution may supercede these laws, by the end of the reporting period, no court challenges had been brought to have them invalidated and no legislation had been proposed to repeal them.

Passports do not indicate an individual's religion; however, the national identity card explicitly notes the holder's religion.

In April 2007 the Ministry of Interior's Nationality and Passport Section canceled Regulation 358 of 1975, which prohibited the issuance of a nationality identity card to those claiming the Baha'i faith. Thereafter, a small number of Baha'is were issued identity cards in May 2007. Without this official citizenship card, Baha'is experienced difficulty registering their children for school and applying for passports. Despite the cancellation, as of the end of the reporting period, Baha'is whose identity records were changed to "Muslim" after Regulation 358 was instituted in 1975, still could not change their identity cards to indicate their Baha'i faith.

A March 2006 citizenship law specifically precludes local Jews from regaining citizenship in the event it is ever withdrawn.

Although the Personal Status Law of 1959 calls for incorporation of Shari'a into the law in the absence of legislative text on a matter, Article 2(1) expressly exempts from its application individuals covered by "special law." Such special law includes British Proclamation No. 6 of 1917 and the Personal Status Law of Foreigners, No. 38, of 1931. Proclamation No. 6 provides that the civil courts consult the religious authority of the non-Muslim parties for its opinion under the applicable religious law and apply this opinion in court.

The Personal Status Law of Foreigners also requires that courts apply the municipal law of the foreign litigants to resolve their domestic law matters. Despite this exception, there are instances in which this law, based on Shari'a principles, applies to non-Muslims, thereby overriding rules particular to their religion. For instance, the law forbids the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man; also, in the distribution of inheritance, a female receives one-half of what a male receives. These provisions could be considered inconsistent with Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees equal protection under the law without discrimination based on gender or religion. No court has yet ruled on this issue.

Article 92 of the Constitution provides that the Federal Supreme Court shall be made up of a number of judges, experts in Islamic jurisprudence, and legal scholars. The law is supposed to regulate the number, method of selection, and work of the Court. At the end of the period covered by this report, such a law had not been enacted, leaving unsettled the question of whether Islamic jurisprudence experts would serve as consultants and advisors to the judges or as members of the Court.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practices generally did not interfere with the free practice of religion; however, the ongoing insurgency significantly harmed the ability of all religious believers to practice their faith. Additionally, sectarian misappropriation of official authority within the security apparatus impeded the right of citizens to worship freely.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on religious beliefs or interpretations of religious doctrine.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government. To register, a group must have a minimum of 500 adherents in the country. According to the Christian and Other Religions Endowment, no reliable information was available on the number of foreign missionaries operating in the country.

Students generally were not prohibited from practicing elements of their faith in school; however, during the reporting period, non-Muslim minorities and secular Arabs in some schools were increasingly forced to adhere to conservative Islamic practices. Basrah's education director required all females in the schools to cover their heads, and all female university students in Mosul, even non-Muslims, were required to wear the hijab, or headscarf.

The Women's Affairs Ministry reported that some male Government officials, police officers, and Muslim clergymen often insist women cover before these men will speak with them.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

It is contrary to stated Government policy for officials to engage in, or tolerate, abuses of an individual's right to religious freedom. However, the Government focused most of its resources and attention on the ongoing insurgency and reconstruction efforts during the reporting period; thus, it did not have the capacity to address matters relating to abuses of freedom of religion. Moreover, deficiencies in security force capabilities and in the rule of law made it difficult for the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or the justice system to investigate or address alleged violations.

Many attributed the continuing high level of violence in the country, especially the tremendous upsurge in sectarian violence following the February 22, 2006, bombing of the al-Askariya Shrine "Golden Mosque" in Samarra, to terrorists at-

tempting to sow sectarian strife. In the aftermath of the Samarra bombing, it became increasingly difficult to determine how much of the violence was based on religious affiliations rather than criminal elements. The Government expressed shock over Pope Benedict XVI's public reading of controversial statements regarding Islam in September 2006. These statements reportedly sparked demonstrations in Basrah and public vows on the Internet to embark on a war against the "worshippers of the cross" by a terrorist group linked to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

The Sunni Arab community often cited police raids of its mosques and religious sites as examples of targeting by the Shi'a-dominated Government. According to residents of Fadhil, a predominantly Sunni neighborhood on the largely Shi'a east side of Baghdad, on April 10, 2007, during a raid on a neighborhood mosque, the Iraqi Army killed two men in front of other worshippers during morning prayers. One resident noted that among the dead was the mosque's muezzin, who called the faithful to prayer from the mosque's loudspeakers.

There were allegations that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) engaged in discriminatory behavior against religious minorities. Christians living north of Mosul claimed that the KRG confiscated their property without compensation and began building settlements on their land. During the reporting period, Assyrian Christians alleged that the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)-dominated judiciary continued to discriminate routinely against non-Muslims and failed to enforce judgments in their favor. Despite such allegations, many non-Muslims fled to Northern Iraq from the more volatile areas in the middle and southern parts of the country, where pressures to conform publicly to narrow interpretations of Islamic teaching were greater. However, migration statistics were not available.

The Armenian Church of Iraq worked with Government officials to regain properties that the former regime forced it to sell. Although the Church was paid fair market value for six properties in Mosul, Basrah, Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Dohuk, it was forced to sell the properties under pressure. However, church officials stated these discussions with the Government about property claims yielded no results during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversions

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. However, Sabean-Mandaeans reported that Islamic extremists threatened, kidnapped, and killed members of their religion for refusing to convert to Islam. Christians also reported that Islamic extremists warned Christians living in Baghdad's Dora district to convert, leave, or be killed.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitic feeling remained a strong undercurrent during the reporting period. For example, in July 2006, the Speaker of Parliament, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, accused Jews of financing violent activity in the country to promote a Zionist sectarian agenda. No Government official condemned his statement. Moreover, once a significant presence in Baghdad, the country's 2,700-year-old Jewish community is now virtually nonexistent.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

While the general lawlessness that permitted criminal gangs, terrorists, and insurgents to victimize citizens with impunity affected persons of all ethnicities and religious groups, many individuals from various religious groups were targeted because of their religious identity or secular leanings. Individuals were victims of not only harassment and intimidation but also kidnapping and even killings. Women and girls were often threatened for refusing to wear the hijab, for dressing in Western-style clothing, or for failing to adhere sufficiently to strict interpretations of conservative Islamic norms governing public behavior. During the reporting period, numerous women, including Christians, reported opting to wear the hijab for security purposes after being harassed for not doing so. One Sabean-Mandaean woman reported that she was burned in the face with acid for not wearing the hijab.

On June 20, 2007, suspected members of a Shi'a militia reportedly detonated a bomb inside a Sunni mosque in Haswa, south of Baghdad. Hours later, attackers struck a mosque near Hillah and targeted the imam's house near the mosque, but the cleric fled when he saw them coming, according to the police. The Sunni mosque bombings appeared to be retribution for the June 19, 2007, suicide truck bombing against the Shi'a Khulani mosque.

Also on June 20, 2007, according to police, a Sunni mosque suffered minor damage from a bomb attack in the town of Iskandariyah, and another Sunni mosque was badly damaged by a bomb attack in the town of Jbela, south of Baghdad.

On June 19, 2007, a suspected al-Qaeda bomber rammed a truck packed with half a ton of explosives into the Shi'a Khulani mosque in central Baghdad, reportedly killing 87 persons and injuring 242.

On June 16, 2007, witnesses and security officials stated hooded gunmen in black blew up the Sunni Ashrah al-Mubashra mosque in Basra after ordering police officers at the mosque to flee. The Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most revered Shi'a cleric in the country, condemned and denounced the attacks on the mosques of Talha Bin al-Zubair and Ashrah al-Mubashra and called on all citizens to prevent, to the best of their ability, such attacks on all shrines and mosques.

On June 15, 2007, an explosion destroyed the Sunni Talha Bin al-Zubair mosque in Basra, apparently in retaliation for the June 13, 2007, destruction of the two minarets of the Askariya Shrine in Samarra, one of the holiest Shi'a shrines. The attack was similar to the February 22, 2006, destruction of the shrine's golden dome that sparked a wave of retaliatory sectarian violence throughout the country.

On June 13, 2007, following the attack on the Asakariya shrine, attackers reportedly set fire to the Sunni Khudair al-Janabi mosque in Bayaa area of Baghdad, and insurgents planted explosives inside the Shi'a shrine of Imam Ali Kamal in Khalis, north of Baghdad, destroying the building completely.

On June 9, 2007, an armed group blew up the Sunni Fatah-Basha mosque in Bayaa. According to the U.S. military, there were no casualties, but the mosque was damaged substantially.

On June 3, 2007, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Iraqi priest Father Ragheed Ganni and three deacons in Mosul when they had returned from celebrating mass.

On June 3, 2007, gunmen reportedly killed Sheikh Ali Khudher al-Zand, imam of a Sunni mosque, in al-Khadhraa district in western Baghdad.

On May 28, 2007, a bomb detonated near the Sunni Abdul Qadir Gilani mosque in Baghdad, killing at least 20 persons. The mosque's imam stated the mosque also suffered serious damage.

On May 4, 2007, the bodies of three Shi'a brothers were found in Adhamiya, a predominantly Sunni neighborhood in Baghdad. On the same day, a Shi'a mosque near the edge of the neighborhood was reportedly burned by insurgents, who kidnapped the mosque's guards.

On April 28, 2007, a suicide car bomber killed 60 persons and injured 170 near the Shi'a shrine to Abbas Ibn Ali in Karbala.

There were reports that on April 22, 2007, gunmen dragged more than 20 members of the Yezidi community off a bus in Mosul and shot them in retaliation for the stoning of a Yezidi woman, slain by fellow Yezidis for having a relationship with a Muslim Kurdish man. These deaths were in addition to the 11 Yezidis killed in the last reporting period, including Ninewa Provincial Council member Hasan Nermo, who was assassinated on April 20, 2006.

On April 28, 2007, a bomb exploded in Karbala near the Imam Hussein Shrine, one of the most important Shi'a holy sites, where the grandson of Islam's prophet Muhammad is buried. The attack killed more than 50 persons. A previous blast occurred on April 14th when a car bomb exploded 200 meters from the shrine as worshippers gathered for evening prayers, killing 56 persons and injuring at least 70 others.

On March 29, 2007, separate attacks targeted crowded Shi'a marketplaces in Baghdad's Shaab district and in Khalis, north of Baghdad. A suicide bombing in Baghdad and coordinated car bombings in Khalis killed at least 119 persons and injured 171.

On March 28, 2007, gunmen affiliated with the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia reportedly stormed homes in Wahda (a Sunni Turkmen neighborhood in Tal Afar) and killed 70, kidnapped 40, and injured 30 in retaliation for bombings in Tal Afar the day before. The March 27, 2007, Tal Afar carnage was the result of truck bombs that exploded in local markets, reportedly killing 85 persons and injuring 183 others. The Sunni and AQI-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) claimed responsibility.

On March 12, 2007, at least 31 houses in a predominantly Shi'a neighborhood in Diyala were doused with gasoline and burned by Sunni insurgents affiliated with the ISI.

Two car bombings, on March 10 and March 11, 2007, killed more than 30 Shi'a pilgrims returning to Baghdad from religious worship in Karbala for the Arbayeen holiday.

On February 24, 2007, a truck bomb exploded near the Sunni Hay al-Ummal mosque in Habbaniyah, killing approximately 40 persons—including 15 who were

praying inside the mosque—and injuring scores. The attack occurred 1 day after the imam of the mosque, Mohammad al-Marawi, had urged worshippers to stand firmly against AQI. Despite warnings from AQI, women in Habbaniyah were not forced to wear the hijab.

On February 15, 2007, allegedly in revenge against 2 Yezidi men found in a car in the company of a married Kurdish woman, dozens of Kurds reportedly attacked the Yezidi district of Shaikhan in Nineveh Governorate, damaging private property and Yezidi cultural buildings.

On January 30, 2007 a suicide bomber struck a crowd entering a Shi'a mosque in Mandali, near the Iranian border, killing 19 persons and injuring 54.

On December 30, 2006, a suicide bomber in Khalis killed Shi'a cleric Sheik Kadhim Hameed Qassim, the sheik of the Khalis Shi'a Mosque, when the cleric arrived at his home after Friday prayers. Officials reported that 10, including the suicide bomber, were killed, and 15 others were injured.

On December 30, 2006, Iraqi Army soldiers reportedly responded to an attack by terrorists on the Al-Hussein mosque in a western district of Baghdad, causing the terrorists to flee before doing any damage.

On December 26, 2006, a car bomb outside the Sunni Abu Hanifa mosque in the Adhamiya district of Baghdad reportedly killed at least 20 persons and injured 35.

On December 4, 2006, gunmen kidnapped an imam of a Sunni mosque in the town of Yathrib, near Balad, north of Baghdad, according to police.

On November 25, 2006, armed insurgents reportedly set the Sunni Al-Nidaa mosque in the Hurriya area of Baghdad on fire by throwing a gas container into the mosque. The mosque sustained smoke and fire damage but was not destroyed.

On November 23, 2006, using three suicide car bombs and two mortar rounds, suspected Sunni-Arab militants conducted coordinated attacks in the predominantly Shi'a Sadr City area of Baghdad, reportedly killing approximately 140 and injuring more than 200. The coordinated bombings followed a 2-hour siege by approximately 30 insurgents against the headquarters of the Shi'a-run Health Ministry in northern Baghdad. In response to the bombings, Shi'a militia groups reportedly fired 10 mortar rounds at the Abu Hanifa mosque in Adhamiya, among the holiest Sunni shrines in Baghdad, killing 1 person and injuring 7.

On September 27, 2006, according to police, gunmen opened fire on worshippers attending evening prayers at the Sunni al-Mashahada mosque in the Hurriya district of Baghdad, killing at least 10 persons and injuring 11.

On September 24, 2006, according to Christian leaders, Assyrian St. Mary's Cathedral of the Ancient Church of the East in al-Riyadh district of Baghdad—home of His Holiness Mar Dinkha II, Patriarch of the Assyrian Ancient Church of the East—was attacked with a hand grenade and a car bomb as worshippers were leaving the Church following Sunday Mass, killing 2 and injuring at least 17.

On September 12, 2006, according to police, insurgents late Monday attacked a Shi'a mosque in Khan Bani Saad, south of Baquba, in Diyala province, killing seven persons, injuring four, and destroying the mosque with mortar fire.

On August 10, 2006, a suicide bomb in front of the Shi'a Imam Ali mosque in Najaf, among the holiest Shi'a shrines worldwide, killed at least 35 persons and injured at least 122, according to the Iraqi Army.

On July 28, 2006, a bomb planted between a youth center and the Sunni al-Ali al-Aadhim mosque in Baghdad exploded as worshippers began leaving after Friday prayers, killing four persons and injuring another nine, according to police.

On July 18, 2006, a suicide bomber attacked a marketplace near the golden domed Kufa shrine in the Shi'a holy town of Kufa, killing 53 persons and injuring at least 105, according to local hospital officials.

On July 17, 2006, attackers set off several car bombs and then rode by in vehicles armed with AK–47s and rocket propelled grenades, shooting into a crowd in the town of Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad. Al-Qaeda in Iraq claimed responsibility via a sign hung on a nearby mosque that stated the attack was revenge against JAM.

On July 14, 2006, a bomb killed 14 persons and injured 5 worshippers leaving services at a Sunni mosque in northern Baghdad. On the same day, according to police, five mortar rounds fell near the Shi'a Imam al-Hussein mosque in Balad Ruz, 45 miles northeast of Baghdad, killing 2 persons and injuring 6.

On July 7, 2006, a bomb targeting the al-Furqan Sunni mosque in northeastern Baghdad injured a passerby. Also, a roadside bomb struck worshippers leaving the Ahmed bin Hanbal Sunni mosque in Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, killing one person and injuring five. A car bomb exploded near a Shi'a mosque as prayers were ending in Sinjar, killing 8 persons and injuring 48.

On July 6, 2006, a suicide car bomber killed 12 persons, mostly Iranian pilgrims, at a Shi'a shrine in the southern city of Kufa.

During the reporting period, Sabean-Mandaean leaders reported that their community was increasingly targeted. In addition to forced conversions and hijab wearing by Sabean-Mandaean women, they reported the kidnapping of 23 Sabean-Mandaeans, with at least 9 held for ransom. In all nine cases, ransom was paid in amounts that were not recorded; however, only seven out of nine abductees were released, while there was no further information on the status of the other two individuals. They also reported that Islamic extremists threatened many Sabean-Mandaeans and killed at least five for refusing to convert to Islam.

During the reporting period, there were also reports that Islamic extremists kidnapped Christians, including at least nine priests, for ransom.

On July 17, 2006, a Chaldean priest was kidnapped in Baghdad and released after 2 days.

On August 15, 2006, a Chaldean priest was kidnapped in Baghdad. He was reportedly tortured and released after a month.

On September 16, 2006, a Chaldean priest was kidnapped in Baghdad and released 2 days later.

On October 11, 2006, Assyrian priest Father Paulos Iskender was kidnapped and beheaded in Mosul 1 week later. He was reportedly targeted in retaliation for statements that the Pope Benedict XVI made in September 2006.

On November 19, 2006, a Chaldean priest was kidnapped in Baghdad. He was released after 9 days.

On November 26, 2006, Protestant clergyman Elder Munthir Al-Saqa from the National Presbyterian Church in Mosul was abducted after leading a Sunday Service at his church that day. He was found dead on November 29. The kidnappers reportedly demanded $1 million in ransom from Elder Munthir's family using his mobile telephone.

On December 4, 2006, a Chaldean priest was kidnapped in Baghdad and released after 6 days.

On May 19, 2007, a Chaldean priest was kidnapped in Baghdad and freed after 2 days.

On June 6, 2007, Chaldean priest Hani Abdel Ahad and five other Christians were kidnapped in Baghdad. The five Christians were released after 1 day, while Father Hani was released in good condition on June 17, 2007. The Chaldean Church confirmed that the kidnappers demanded ransom but declined to comment on the amount.

Christian leaders inside and outside of the country reported that members of their Baghdad community, especially in the district of Dora, received threat letters demanding that Christians leave or be killed. In press reports Christian leaders stated that 500 families left the Dora District between April and May 2007, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reportedly counted at least 100 families fleeing Dora.

The magnitude of sectarian attacks on both Sunnis and Shi'a were also extremely high, albeit difficult to track.

The Ministry of Migration and Displacement in Iraq noted in January 2007 that according to its estimates, nearly half of the country's minority communities fled to other countries since 2003. An anonymous UNHCR source in January 2007 reported minorities make up 30 percent of Iraqi refugees, whose total number was then thought to be 1.8 million. The source noted that in Syria alone, 36 percent of the estimated 700,000 Iraqi refugees who arrived there between October 2003 and March 2005 were members of religious minorities.

In addition, according to the International Organization on Migration (IOM), by the end of 2006, there were 1.5 million internally displaced persons in the country. During the reporting period, many families fled mixed neighborhoods for fear of attack, and IOM reports indicated that approximately 247,000 persons were internally displaced during 2006. Sixty-four percent of the internally displaced were Shi'a Muslims, 28 percent were Sunni Muslims, 7 percent were Christians, less than 1 percent were Yezidis, and less than 1 percent were Sabean-Mandaeans.

In addition to targeting non-Muslims, terrorists continued to threaten and attack both Sunni and Shi'a communities during the reporting period. Both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims reported receiving death threat letters demanding that they leave their neighborhoods following the attack on the al-Askiriya mosque in February 2006. Shi'a and Sunnis reportedly left their homes to avoid these threats. Some were living in internally displaced camps, while the majority sought refuge with families or through religious community support systems.

The Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement estimated in April 2006 that 11,000 families had left their homes following the February 2006 attack on the al-Askiriya Mosque, while the IOM estimated 6,500 families fled their homes. The IOM did not dispute the Government's figures, noting its estimates did not include

persons who sought shelter with family or friends. Between February and March 2006, one resident of the Baghdad neighborhood of Dora reportedly fled his home with his wife and four children after militants killed his brother and left a note on his door reading: "Leave the area or have your head chopped off. You Shi'a are traitors and America's allies." The family took shelter in an abandoned sports hall in the Mansour neighborhood.

In March 2006 a Shi'a farmer and his family of seven reportedly fled their home after masked militants threatened to kill his family if they remained in Latifiya, a village south of Baghdad. The family and other displaced persons were reportedly squatting in a derelict hotel in Najaf.

During April 2006 Sunnis reportedly received threatening text messages and videos filmed on mobile phone cameras. In one, a Sunni Iraqi man who entered a mainly Shi'a neighborhood of Baghdad is seen being beaten and killed by men in black clothes. The video was then sent out with a warning that this would happen to any other Sunni who entered the area.

Insurgents attacked mosques in Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods and killed clerics, other religious leaders, and private citizens of both sects. For example, on June 6, 2007, three unidentified gunmen shot and killed Sheikh Raheem al-Hesnawi, a representative of top Shi'a cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, in front of his house in Najaf. Al-Hesnawi was a prominent Shi'a cleric in the al-Mekhshab region in southern Najaf. Furthermore, on June 3, 2007, gunmen killed Sheikh Ali Khudher al-Zand, imam of a Sunni mosque, in al-Khadhraa district in western Baghdad. Official death tolls for these kinds of incidents were not available, but individual cases continued to be reported through the end of the reporting period.

Between 2004 and 2006, Islamist militants harassed shopkeepers for providing goods or services they considered to be inconsistent with Islam and sometimes killed them for failing to comply with warnings to stop such activity. Liquor store owners, primarily Christians and Yezidis, were especially targeted. Liquor stores in Baghdad, Mosul, and Basrah were bombed, looted, and defaced. More than 50 liquor stores operated by Assyrians in Baghdad were closed due to threats by Islamic extremists. Christian leaders verified that Christian owners of movie theaters, restaurants, and liquor stores were targeted during the reporting period; however, detailed information on each of the incidents were not available.

A Chaldean clergyman reported in April 2007 that "in the last 2 months many Churches have been forced to remove their crosses from their domes." For example, Muslim extremists climbed onto the roof and removed the cross of the Church of Saint George in Baghdad. In the Chaldean Church of Saint John, in the Dora district of Baghdad, the parishioners decided to move the cross to a safer place after repeated threats.

The Chaldean Patriarchate in January 2007 officially transferred Babel College, the major Chaldean seminary and the only Christian theological university in the country, from the Dora district in Baghdad to Ankawa near Irbil after months of closure following kidnappings and threats against Christians. Between September and December 2006, the rector and vice rector of the seminary were kidnapped in Baghdad; both were released after a week.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite the tenuous security environment and the Government's preoccupation with fighting the insurgency and rebuilding the country's infrastructure, the Government took positive steps with respect to religious freedom during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, Government leaders spoke of the need for all citizens to unite—regardless of religious orientation—to confront terrorism. Government leaders often emphasized their commitment to equal treatment for all religious groups and ethnicities. The Government also made clear it would not exempt mosques and homes of religious leaders from assault if they were being used as insurgent strongholds.

The Government publicly denounced all incidents of sectarian violence and repeatedly encouraged unity among the county's religious sects.

The Government canceled Regulation 358 of 1975, which prohibits the issuance of a nationality identity card to those claiming the Baha'i faith.

Religious leaders of all religious groups condemned the terrorist acts committed by the insurgency and urged the country's religious communities to refrain from retaliation and join together to end the violence.

Approximately 55 Sunni, Shi'a, Christian, Kurdish, and Yezidi religious and tribal figures attended the 2 day Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress conference, from June 11 to 12, 2007, and produced a religious accord calling for a reduction of violence in

the country. During a side meeting, Prime Minister Maliki expressed to the delegation his strong support for the future work of the Congress.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Conservative and extremist Islamic elements continued to exert tremendous pressure on society to conform to their interpretations of Islam's precepts. Although this impacted both the Sunni and Shi'a secular Muslim population, non-Muslims were especially vulnerable to the pressure and violence because of their minority status and their lack of protection provided by a tribal structure. For example, Sabean-Mandaeans reported that since the fall of Saddam's regime, they have become increasingly vulnerable to targeting by Islamic militias. This is because they are few in number, live in small groups spread across the country, and are not able to defend themselves, since nonviolence is a significant tenet of their religion. Sabean-Mandaeans reported that in Basrah, leaflets were distributed in June 2007 stating, "Sunnis and Suba [slang for Sabean-Mandaean] get out." Similar leaflets were reportedly distributed in Nassriya in May 2007 and in the Hay Al Amil District of Baghdad in June 2007.

Sunni Muslims claimed general discrimination, alleging revenge by the Shi'a majority for the Sunnis' presumed favored status and abuses of Shi'as under the former regime, but also because of the public's perception that the insurgency was composed primarily of Sunni extremists and former regime elements with whom the majority of the Sunni population supposedly sympathized. While some within the Sunni community supported and even assisted the insurgency, many denounced the terrorism as vocally as their non-Sunni counterparts.

Non-Muslims, particularly Christians, complained of being isolated by the Muslim majority because of their religious differences. Despite their statistically proportional representation in the National Assembly, many non-Muslims stated they were disenfranchised and their interests not adequately represented.

The combination of discriminatory hiring practices by members of the majority Muslim population, attacks against non-Muslim businesses, and the overall lack of rule of law, have also had a detrimental economic impact on the non-Muslim community and contributed to the departure of significant numbers of non-Muslims from the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government is committed to promoting religious freedom and continues to work closely with the Government on this as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials at all levels, including the Secretary of State, regularly engaged the Government on problems relating to freedom of religion. This took the form of public statements calling for unity in the face of sectarian violence, high level meetings with Government officials and religious leaders, and working level interaction urging representatives of the Government and religious organizations to include minorities.

The U.S. Embassy's primary focus during the reporting period was on reducing sectarian violence, increasing Sunni and non-Muslim inclusion in the political and constitutional development processes. The United States worked to increase Sunni inclusion in the political process by strongly advocating a nonsectarian unity Government, encouraging the passage of legislation that would bring Sunnis into the political process, and providing technical assistance to Sunni leaders.

The Iraqi Institute of Peace (IIP) regularly meets with tribal leaders, senior clerics, and community leaders in tension filled areas to discuss religious freedom issues.

ISRAEL

A report on the Occupied Territories (including areas subject to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority) is appended at the end of this report.

The country has no Constitution; however, the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Relations among religious and ethnic groups—between Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and Christians, Arabs and non-Arabs, secular and religious

Jews, and among the different streams of Judaism—often were strained. Problems continued to exist, stemming primarily from the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Government's unequal treatment of non-Orthodox Jewish religious groups, including the Government's recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning Jews.

Tensions between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs increased significantly after the start of the second Palestinian Intifada (or uprising) in 2000. Tensions increased further following the July 12 to August 14, 2006, conflict in Southern Lebanon, during which some Israeli-Arab community leaders expressed public sympathy for Hizballah, and some Jewish political leaders characterized Israeli Arabs as enemies of the state. Tensions remained high due to institutional, legal, and societal discrimination against the country's non-Jewish citizens.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Based on its pre-1967 borders, the country has an area of 7,685 square miles, and its population is 7.15 million, of which 5.4 million are Jewish, 1.4 million are Arabs, and 310,000 are classified as "other"—mostly persons from the former Soviet Union who immigrated under the Law of Return but who did not qualify as Jews according to the Orthodox Jewish definition or the definition used by the Government for civil procedures. According to a Government survey conducted in 2004 and published in 2005, approximately 8 percent of the Jewish population are Haredim, or ultra-Orthodox, and another 9 percent are Orthodox, while 39 percent describe themselves as "traditionally observant" or "traditional," and 44 percent describe themselves as "secular" Jews, most of whom observed some Jewish traditions. A growing but still small number of traditional and secular Jews associate themselves with the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist streams of Judaism, which are not officially recognized for purposes of civil and personal status matters involving their adherents. Although the Government does not officially recognize them, these streams of Judaism received a small amount of Government funding and were recognized by the country's courts.

Slightly more than 20 percent of the population is non-Jewish, the vast majority of whom are ethnically Arab. Of this number, Muslims constitute 16 percent, Christians 2.1 percent; Druze 1.5 percent; and members of other religious groups 0.5 percent, including relatively small communities of evangelical Christians, Messianic Jews (those who consider themselves Jewish but believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah), and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Government reported that during 2006 it issued 86,000 permits for foreigners to work in the country. The Government estimated that another 70,000 to 80,000 illegal foreign workers reside in the country. Most of the foreign workers are Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Buddhist, or Hindu.

The Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty describes the country as a "Jewish" and "democratic" state. Most members of the non-Jewish minority were generally free to practice their religions but were subject to various forms of discrimination, some of which have religious dimensions.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

There is no Constitution; however, the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Israel's Declaration of Independence describes the country as a "Jewish state," and promises full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation. While the law explicitly guarantees freedom of religion and the safeguarding of "holy places of all religions," inequities exist. Israeli Arabs and other non-Jews generally were free to practice their religions; however, discrepancies in treatment existed. Discrepancies between Jews and various non-Jewish communities and between Orthodox Jews and Jews of non-Orthodox affiliations were also prevalent during the reporting period.

The 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law applies to holy sites of all religious groups within the country and in all of Jerusalem. The Penal Law makes it a criminal offense to damage any holy site. However, the Government only issued implementing regulations for Jewish sites.

The "status quo" agreement reached at the founding of the state, which has been upheld throughout the state's history, provides that the Government will implement certain policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. For ex-

ample, the Government does not allow civil marriage and does not recognize Jewish marriages performed in the country unless they are performed by the Orthodox Jewish establishment. Exclusive control over marriages resides by law with recognized bodies of the recognized religious denominations. The Orthodox Jewish establishment also determines who is buried in Jewish state cemeteries, limiting this right to individuals considered "Jewish" by the Orthodox standards. In addition, the national airline El Al and public buses in every city but Haifa do not operate on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath; however, several private bus companies do. Additionally, streets in most Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods are closed to vehicles on the Sabbath. According to the Law on Work and Rest Hours of 1951, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in April 2005, Jews in most professions are prohibited from working on the Sabbath unless they are granted a special permit by the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Employment. However, according to the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), the Government often chooses not to enforce the law.

The law considers "religious communities" those recognized by, and carried over from, the British Mandate period (1920–1948), during which Great Britain administered present-day Israel and the Occupied Territories. These include: Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian-Catholic, Syrian (Catholic), Chaldean (Chaldean Uniate Catholic), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Jewish. Since the founding of the country, the Government has recognized three additional religious communities—the Druze (an offshoot of Islam) in 1957, the Evangelical Episcopal Church in 1970, and the Baha'i in 1971. The fact that the Muslim population was not defined as a religious community was a vestige of the Ottoman period when Islam was the dominant religion, and it does not limit Muslims from practicing their faith. A collection of ad hoc arrangements with various Government agencies has defined the status of several Christian denominations with representation in the country. The Government allows members of unrecognized religious groups the freedom to practice their religion. According to the Government, there were no religious groups awaiting recognition during the reporting period.

With some exceptions, each recognized religious community has legal authority over its members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial. Legislation enacted in 1961 afforded the Muslim courts exclusive jurisdiction to rule in matters of personal status concerning Muslims. For so-called "unrecognized religions," no local religious tribunals exercised jurisdiction over their members in matters of personal status. Only recognized religious communities receive Government funding for their religious services. In recent years, the Arrangements Law, drafted annually to guide Government spending, has provided exemption from municipal taxes for any place of worship of a recognized faith. Exemption from tax payments is also granted to churches that have not been officially recognized by law. In several cases, the Government has interpreted that exemption from municipal taxes to apply only to that portion of the property of religious organizations that was actually used for religious worship. Not-for-profit religious organizations also sometimes receive tax exemptions. For example, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) had tax-exempt status for its hospital on the Mount of Olives for almost 40 years until the District Court revoked this privilege in 2002. The LWF appealed to the Supreme Court and commenced negotiations with the Government to resolve the issue. At the end of the reporting period, the case was still pending before the Supreme Court as negotiations continued.

Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but parties, by mutual agreement, may bring such cases to religious courts. Jewish, Druze, and Christian 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. Muslims have the right to bring matters such as alimony and property division associated with divorce cases to civil courts in family-status matters. However, paternity cases remain under the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts. There is no overarching law or directive that prescribes these varying approaches.

In 2003 the Government introduced a core curriculum program that required all state-funded schools to teach core subjects, such as mathematics. However, state-subsidized ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious schools were not compelled to comply with this law. The High Court ruled in December 2004 that ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious schools that did not comply with the Education Ministry's core curriculum by the opening of the 2007 school year would not be eligible for any funding from the ministry. The ruling was a response to a petition filed by the Secondary Schools Teachers' Association against the Ministry of Education charging that while the ministry cut funding to the public school system, causing hundreds of teachers to lose their jobs, it provided approximately $40 million (170 million New Israeli Shekels—NIS) to autonomous ultra-Orthodox schools that did not comply with ministry

pedagogical requirements. In April 2006 the Education Ministry reported that all of the "recognized but unofficial" education facilities affiliated with ultra-Orthodox parties were now "fully implementing the core curriculum program."

The Supreme Court ruled in April 2006 that rabbinic courts may not arbitrate property disputes between a divorced husband and wife. This ruling has, in effect, repudiated the authority of the rabbinic courts to serve as arbitrators in all financial disputes, even if neither party in the dispute objects to the rabbinic courts playing this role. Although the rabbinic courts have ruled on financial matters since before the establishment of the state, their jurisdiction on these matters has never been established in law. In response to the Supreme Court ruling, the rabbinic courts initiated a Knesset bill to secure in law their jurisdiction over financial matters, which they presented in June 2006 to the Justice Ministry for its consideration.

The Ministry of the Interior has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups; the Ministry of Tourism is responsible for the protection and upkeep of all holy sites; and the National Religious Services Authority, within the Prime Minister's office, has jurisdiction over the nation's 134 religious councils (one Druze and the rest Jewish) that oversee the provision of religious services to their respective communities. Legislation establishing religious councils does not include non-Jewish religious communities other than the Druze. Instead, the Ministry of the Interior directly funds religious services for recognized non-Jewish communities. The state, through the Prime Minister's office, continues to finance approximately 40 percent of the religious councils' budgets, and local authorities fund the remainder. The Government's 2006 budget for Religious Councils was $32.9 million (140 million NIS).

According to Government figures, the 2006 budget for religious services and religious structures for the Jewish population was approximately $329 million (1.4 billion NIS). Religious minorities received approximately $26 million (112 million NIS), or just over 7 percent of total funding.

Under the Law of Return, the Government grants immigration and residence rights to individuals who meet established criteria defining Jewish identity. Included in this definition is a child or grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew, and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew. The Government uses a separate, more rigorous standard based on Orthodox Jewish criteria to determine the right to full citizenship, entitlement to Government financial support for immigrants, the legitimacy of conversions to Judaism performed within the country, and Jewish status for purposes of personal and some civil status problems. Residency rights are not granted to relatives of converts to Judaism, except for children of female converts who are born after the mother's conversion is complete. The Law of Return generally does not apply to non-Jews or to persons of Jewish descent who have converted to another faith. Approximately 36 percent of the country's Jewish population was born outside of the country.

The Government does not require that identification cards carry a nationality (i.e., usually religious) designation. However, citizens and residents are still required to register with the Ministry of the Interior's Population Registry as one of a set list of nationalities.

Politicians, media outlets, and many private citizens criticized the Government's practice of granting military draft exemptions and living allowances to full-time yeshiva (Jewish religious school) students. Under the so-called Tal Law, passed in 2002 and renewed in 2007, ultra-Orthodox Jews are entitled to exemption from military service to pursue religious studies. This exemption allows ultra-Orthodox Jews to postpone military service in 1-year increments to pursue fulltime religious studies at recognized yeshivas. These students must renew their deferments each year by proving that they are full-time students. At the age of 22, the yeshiva students receive a 1-year hiatus from their deferment obligations, during which they have the option of performing community service, learning a trade, or serving in the army for an abbreviated enlistment period. Students who choose none of these are subject to the military draft at the conclusion of the grace year, unless they continue their yeshiva studies full time with yearly renewals until they reach the age of 40. According to the Government watchdog group Movement for Quality, since 2002 only 1,520 ultra-Orthodox men have chosen to enter the workforce through programs mandated by the Tal Law, while 50,000 have continued to study in yeshivas. According to Israeli Defense Force (IDF) figures released in July 2007, approximately 11 percent of all male candidates for military service have deferments as full-time yeshiva students, up from 7.3 percent in 2000.

Public Hebrew-speaking secular schools teach Jewish history and Jewish religious texts. These classes primarily cover Jewish heritage and culture, rather than religious belief. Public schools with predominantly Arab student bodies teach mandatory classes on the Qur'an and the Bible, since both Muslim and Christian Arabs

attend these schools. Orthodox Jewish religious schools that are part of the public school system teach mandatory religion classes, as do private ultra-Orthodox schools that receive some state funding.

The Government recognizes the following Jewish holy days as national holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simhat Torah, Passover, and Shavuot. Arab municipalities often recognize Christian and Muslim holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, problems continued. Muslim, Christian, and Orthodox Jewish religious authorities have exclusive control over personal status matters, including marriage, divorce, and burial, within their respective communities. Many Jewish citizens objected to such exclusive control by the Orthodox establishment over Jewish marriages and other personal status matters, and to the absence of provision for civil marriage. Approximately 306,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union were ineligible to marry in Israel because they were not recognized as Jewish by Orthodox authorities.

Anyone wishing to marry in a secular ceremony, Jews wishing to marry in non-Orthodox religious ceremonies, Jews not officially recognized as Jewish by the Orthodox Jewish establishment but wishing to marry in Jewish ceremonies, and Jews wishing to marry someone of another faith must all do so abroad. The Ministry of the Interior recognizes such marriages when performed abroad. During the reporting period, approximately 300,000 citizens were not eligible to marry in Israel because they lacked religious affiliation. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, between 2000 and 2004, 32,009 citizens married outside of the country. Almost half of this number—14,214—comprised couples in which both the husband and the wife were Jewish. A smaller proportion of this number—1,764—lacked religious affiliation in the country. Between 2000 and 2003, 5 percent of Jewish couples that qualified to be married by the Chief Rabbinate decided to marry abroad instead. Others decided instead to hold weddings unrecognized by the Government, including Reform and Conservative weddings and those conducted by Kibbutz authorities.

In November 2004 the Arab-Israeli advocacy group Adalah petitioned the Supreme Court to compel the Government to protect Muslim sites. Adalah charged that all of the locations designated as holy sites were Jewish, and the Government's failure to implement regulations had resulted in desecration and conversion of individual Muslim sites. Responding to a 2004 Supreme Court order to respond within 60 days, the Government stated in January 2006 that it had appointed an interministerial committee to examine the administrative and budgetary management of holy sites. The Supreme Court, which repeatedly rescheduled the initial hearing since 2004, had still not heard the case by the end of the reporting period. At the end of the reporting period there were 136 designated holy sites in the country, all of which were Jewish.

In 2004 the Arab Association for Human Rights (AAHR) issued a comprehensive report documenting what it referred to as the "destruction and abuse of Muslim and Christian holy places in Israel." In its report, AAHR asserted that 250 non-Jewish places of worship had either been destroyed during and after the 1948 war or made inaccessible to the local Arab population. For example, lands of destroyed Arab villages were given to Jewish farmers, and the surviving mosques in these villages had been used as animal pens or storage depots. In Ein Hod, a town south of Haifa, the mosque was turned into a bar.

During Jewish holidays and following terrorist attacks, the Government imposed closures to restrict travel in the country and the Occupied Territories for security purposes that had the effect of impeding access to holy sites in the country for Arab Muslims and Christians, as well as Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians who possessed Jerusalem identification cards. The construction of the separation barrier also impeded access to holy sites throughout the country and the Occupied Territories during the reporting period.

The Government permits religious organizations to apply for state funding to maintain or build religious facilities. Funding was provided for the maintenance of facilities such as churches, Orthodox synagogues, mosques, and cemeteries. Funding for construction was not provided for non-Orthodox synagogues. Several civil rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) asserted that Orthodox Jewish facilities receive significantly greater proportions of funding than did non-Orthodox Jewish and non-Jewish facilities. Muslim groups complained that the Government did not equitably fund the construction and maintenance of mosques in comparison to the funding of synagogues.

In March 2005 a dispute over the sale of property in Jerusalem's Old City owned by the Greek Orthodox Church to investors led a Holy Synod meeting in Istanbul

to depose the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, Irineos I, in May 2005. Irineos I claimed that proceedings against him were illegal and refused to resign. While Greece, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority recognized the ousting of Irineos and the appointment of Theophilus III as his successor, the Government of Israel did not. In November 2005 Theophilus appealed this issue to the Israeli High Court, and at the same time a ministerial committee was established to deal with the situation. At the end of the reporting period, the committee had not resolved the issue, and the Government of Israel continued to recognize the deposed Patriarch. The High Court was scheduled to hear the case in November 2007.

In 2006 AAHR reported that the Government was reluctant to refurbish mosques in areas where there was no longer a Muslim population and has never in its history budgeted for the building of a new mosque. Muslim clerics, judges, and political leaders cited a lack of Government funding for maintenance of and access to mosques in Tiberias, Safed, Beersheva, Caesaria and other places. The Government allowed private citizens or municipalities to turn several into galleries, restaurants, and museums. The Government stated that the AAHR report referred to abandoned sites and not to active sites, and the abandoned sites were not properly maintained. There is no restriction on the construction of new mosques, but the Government noted that while the state budget does not cover the costs of new construction, it does provide assistance in the maintenance of mosques. The Government reported that the budget for developing and maintaining the holy sites of each non-Jewish religious community in 2006 was $1.38 million (NIS 5.81 million). The Government's total development budget for cemeteries of all religious groups was approximately $7.06 million (NIS 30 million) in 2005.

Muslim residents of the Be'er Sheva area, including members of Bedouin tribes, protested the municipality's intention to reopen the city's old mosque as a museum rather than as a mosque for the area's Muslim residents. The High Court rejected a petition from Adalah, representing the area's Muslim community, to enjoin the municipality from renovating the mosque into a museum. The petitioners argued that there were no alternative mosques in the Be'er Sheva area. In July 2006 the High Court proposed a compromise whereby the mosque would be used as a museum of Islamic culture. On January 21, 2007, Adalah rejected the court proposal, arguing that there was a need to uphold the religious rights of area Muslims. Adalah's response to the court observed that while there was one synagogue for every 700 Jews in Be'er Sheva, there was not a single mosque for the city's 5000 Muslims. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Building codes for places of worship are enforced selectively based on religion. Several Bedouin living in unrecognized villages were denied building permits for construction of mosques, and in the past the Government has destroyed mosques built in unrecognized Bedouin communities. Adalah reported that, in 2005 the state requested a demolition order for a mosque in Husseiniya. The case was still pending at the end of the reporting period. According to the Regional Council for the Arab Unrecognized Villages in the Negev, the Government did not destroy any mosques during the reporting period.

Missionaries were allowed to proselytize, although offering or receiving material inducements for conversion or converting persons under 18 years old remained illegal unless one parent was of the religion to which the minor wished to convert. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) voluntarily refrained from proselytizing under a longstanding agreement with the Government.

By the end of the reporting period, the Knesset had not ratified the Fundamental Agreement that was negotiated in the 1990s establishing relations between the Holy See and the Government. In a separate process, representatives of the Government and the Holy See continued to hold intermittent negotiating sessions, begun in 2004, with the aim of reaching an agreement (concordat) on fiscal and legal matters such as tax exemption of Roman Catholic institutions and property and the access of the Roman Catholic Church to Israeli courts. No agreement had been reached by the end of the reporting period.

Since the Government does not have diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Muslim citizens must travel through another country, usually Jordan, to obtain travel documents for the Hajj. The average annual number of Hajj pilgrims traveling from the country in recent years was approximately 4,500, and the overall number allowed to participate in the Hajj was determined by Saudi Arabian authorities. According to the Government, travel to hostile countries, including travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj, may be restricted; however, these restrictions are based on security concerns rather than on any religious or ethnic factors.

During the reporting period, many groups and individuals of numerous religious groups traveled to the country freely. However, according to representatives of Christian institutions, visa issuance rates for some of their religious workers signifi-

cantly declined from rates in previous years. Religious workers based in Jerusalem or the Occupied Territories were denied entry or re-entry under a general tightening of Government criteria for foreign nationals. In January 2007 the Government published new visa criteria intended to loosen the restrictions on travelers with legitimate business, including religious workers, in the Occupied Territories. At the end of the reporting period, it was still too early to tell whether the new visa criteria would alleviate the problem.

The Government discriminated against non-Jewish citizens and residents, the vast majority of whom were Arab Muslims and Christians, in the areas of employment, education, and housing. The Orr Legal Commission of Inquiry, established to investigate the 2000 police killing of 12 Israeli-Arab demonstrators, issued a final report in 2003 noting historical, societal, and governmental discrimination against Arab citizens. The Government has not implemented either the Orr Commission recommendations or those of a follow-up interministerial committee.

According to a March 2005 media report, approximately 8,000 non-Jewish soldiers were serving in the IDF. The IDF policy is to allow non-Jewish soldiers to go on home leave for their respective religious holidays. Military duties permitting, Jewish soldiers can leave on holidays. These duties rotate to allow some soldiers to go home for Jewish holidays. The IDF conducts commemorative activities appropriate for each respective Jewish holiday.

The IDF did not have any Muslim or Christian chaplains because, according to Government sources, the frequent home leave accorded all soldiers allowed Muslim and Christian soldiers easy and regular access to their respective clergy and religious services at home. There were discussions between the IDF and the Israeli National Security Council regarding chaplain appointments for non-Jewish IDF soldiers, but no decision had been made by the end of the reporting period.

The Government used private non-Jewish clergy as chaplains at military burials when a non-Muslim or non-Jewish soldier died in service. The Interior Ministry reported that it provided imams to conduct funerals according to Muslim customs. All Jewish chaplains in the IDF are Orthodox.

The IDF sponsored Orthodox Jewish conversion courses for Jewish soldiers who do not belong to Orthodox Judaism and for non-Jewish soldiers seeking to convert to Judaism. The IDF does not facilitate conversion to other religious groups.

Military service is only compulsory for Jews, Druze, and Circassians. Orthodox Jews could obtain exemptions from service for full-time religious study. Approximately 90 percent of Israeli Arabs chose not to serve in the army. Some Arab citizens, mainly Bedouin, were accepted as volunteers. Israeli-Arab advocacy groups charged that housing, educational, and other benefits, as well as employment preferences based on military experience, effectively discriminate in favor of the Jewish population, the majority of who serve in the military. In December 2004 the Ivri Committee on National Service recommended to the Government that Israeli-Arabs be afforded an opportunity to perform alternative nonmilitary service. On December 13, 2006, the Government announced procedures to offer a civilian service program to citizens not drafted for military service. Beginning in June 2007 Israeli Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews are expected to have the opportunity to serve for 1 to 2 years as volunteers in health, education, or welfare sectors. After completing service, volunteers would be eligible for the same national benefits accorded military veterans.

Government resources available for religious/heritage studies to Arab and to non-Orthodox Jewish public schools were proportionately less than those available to Orthodox Jewish public schools. According to IRAC, in 2006 approximately 96 percent of all state funds for Jewish religious education were allocated exclusively to Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools. Both public and private Arab schools offer studies in both Islam and Christianity, but the state funding for such studies was proportionately less than the funding for religious education courses in Jewish Orthodox schools.

The Government funded secular schools and Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools; it did not fully fund religious schools for non-Jews. Schools that seek to adopt a non-Jewish, religious curriculum must operate outside of the regular public schools system. Quality private religious schools for Israeli Arabs existed; however, parents often must pay tuition for their children to attend such schools, since little Government funding was available. Jewish private religious schools, however, received significant Government funding in addition to philanthropic contributions from within the country and abroad, which effectively lowered the tuition costs.

Government funding to the different religious sectors was disproportionate to the sectors' sizes. Civil rights NGOs charged that the Government favored Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish institutions in the allocation of state resources for religious activities.

In spite of the legal provision for public funding to build non-Orthodox synagogues, the Government did not fund the construction of any non-Orthodox synagogues. In 2003 IRAC petitioned the High Court on behalf of a Reform congregation in Modi'in to require that Modi'in municipality fund construction of a Reform synagogue. The city had already funded eight Orthodox synagogues, but no Conservative or Reform synagogues. The High Court ruled in 2003 that it was permissible to use state funds for the construction of a Reform synagogue in the city of Modi'in and ordered the municipality to repeat the process for determining which congregations would receive funding using criteria that would guarantee equal treatment. Nevertheless, the request for funding stalled in the Modi'in municipality. IRAC again petitioned the High Court to compel the municipality to hold a hearing to consider all available budget requests for synagogue construction in light of the needs of Modi'in residents. IRAC also petitioned the court to freeze all municipal allocations for synagogue construction in Modi'in until such a hearing was held. In 2005 the Government announced that it would build synagogues for non-Orthodox denominations, but it had not allocated any such funding by the end of the reporting period.

The 1996 Alternative Burial Law established the right of any individual to be buried in a civil ceremony and required the establishment of 21 public civil cemeteries throughout the country. However, at the end of the reporting period, only 1 public civil cemetery existed in the country, in Be'er Sheva, and only approximately 15 Jewish cemeteries in the country contained a section for civil burials. Several domestic civil rights and immigrant groups asserted that the Government failed to allocate adequate space or sufficient funds for the establishment of civil cemeteries. Certain Kibbutzim also offered civil burials, but according to some NGOs such burials were expensive. During the reporting period, the city of Jerusalem began construction of a cemetery for use by secular citizens free of charge. When completed, this cemetery would be the first public civil cemetery endorsed by a municipal government in the country.

Approximately 93 percent of land in the country is public domain, the majority of which is owned by the state, with approximately 12.5 percent owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF). All public lands and that owned by the JNF are administered by the governmental body, the Israel Lands Administration (ILA). JNF representatives occupy 50 percent of the seats in the ILA's governing council. By law public land may only be leased, and the JNF's statutes prohibit land sale or lease to non-Jews. In January 2005 the Attorney General ruled the Government cannot discriminate against Israeli Arabs in marketing and allocation of lands it manages, including lands the ILA manages for the JNF. The Attorney General also decided that the Government should compensate the JNF with land equal in size to any plots of JNF land won by non-Jewish citizens in Government tenders.

In March 2004 the Knesset rejected two bills that would have allowed for civil marriage. In July 2004 the chairman of a Knesset committee established to formulate a civil marriage option announced that the committee would not complete its work or issue recommendations due to what was characterized as political interference with the committee's work. In April 2005 the High Court instructed the Government to inform the court within 3 months of the Government's position on whether to recognize so-called "consular marriages," those conducted by officials of foreign Embassies in the country; at the end of the reporting period, the Government continued to review its policy. Government recognition of consular marriages would enable couples with no religious affiliation, or those of a religion not recognized by the Government, to wed in such civil ceremonies. Consular weddings have not been performed since 1995, when the Foreign Ministry issued a memorandum to foreign Embassies instructing them to cease performing consular marriages.

The state does not recognize conversions to Judaism performed in the country by non-Orthodox rabbis. In 2005 the High Court ruled that, for the purpose of conferring citizenship rights, the Government must recognize those non-Orthodox conversions of non-citizen legal residents that were begun in the country but formalized abroad by acknowledged Jewish religious authorities, even if not of the Orthodox strain. In a separate 2004 ruling, the court determined that non-Jews who move to the country and then convert in the country through an Orthodox conversion were eligible to become immigrants and citizens pursuant to the Law of Return. Previously, non-Jews were entitled to immigrate to the country and obtain full citizenship only if these conversions were conducted entirely abroad and under Orthodox standards. The High Court did not, however, rule on whether the Government must recognize non-Orthodox conversions formalized in the country.

In May 2006 the Chief Rabbinate announced that it had decided 2 years earlier not to recognize automatically conversions performed by Orthodox rabbis abroad, citing the need for consistency of standards in the conversion process. At the end of the reporting period, negotiations continued between the Chief Rabbinate and the

Rabbinical Council of America over the identification of Orthodox tribunals abroad whose conversion rulings would be recognized by Israel's Chief Rabbinate.

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—literally "chained women"—are unable to remarry or have legitimate children because their husbands have either disappeared or refused to grant divorces. Rabbinical tribunals have the authority to impose sanctions on husbands who refuse to divorce their wives or on wives who refuse to accept divorce from their husbands, but they cannot grant a divorce without the husband's consent. In 2004 a rabbinical court decided for the first time to jail a woman who refused to accept a divorce from her husband. Rabbinical courts also could exercise jurisdiction over, and issue sanctions against, non-Israeli Jews present in the country. On November 3, 2006, the country's Chief Sephardi Rabbi ordered the cancellation without explanation of an international conference on the agunot scheduled for the following week in Jerusalem.

Some Islamic law courts have held that Muslim women could not request a divorce but could be forced to consent if a divorce was granted to the husband. One Arab Muslim woman who won a divorce from her abusive husband in a Muslim court subsequently filed a civil suit against the husband with the Magistrates Court in the north. The court set a precedent in 2005 by awarding the woman approximately $10,000 (42,500 NIS) in compensation for damage to her status and chances of re-marrying. Divorced Arab women were stigmatized in their communities and experienced difficulties remarrying.

Members of unrecognized religious groups, particularly evangelical Christians, sometimes faced problems in obtaining marriage certifications or burial services that were similar to the problems faced by Jews who were not considered Jewish by the Orthodox establishment. Informal arrangements with other recognized religious groups provided relief in some cases.

Most Orthodox Jews believed that mixed gender prayer services violate the precepts of Judaism. As a result, such services were prohibited at the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism, and men and women must use separate areas to visit the Western Wall. Women also were not allowed to conduct any prayers at the Western Wall wearing prayer shawls, which were typically worn by men, and cannot read from Torah scrolls. In 2003 the Women of the Wall, a group of more than 100 Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform women, lost their 14-year legal battle to hold formal women's prayer services at the Western Wall. The High Court ruled that the group could not hold prayer services at the Western Wall and instead would be permitted to hold them at nearby Robinson's Arch, part of an archeological site. The court ordered the Government to prepare an area at Robinson's Arch where women could read aloud from the Torah and conduct group prayers, and the Government inaugurated a plaza in this area for women's services in August 2004.

Another religious group, the Masorti movement (which represents the Conservative stream in U.S. Judaism) regularly held prayer services at Robinson's Arch according to its own customs, which include men and women praying together, women reading from the Torah, and women wearing a tallit or tefillin. However, they could pray only between seven and eight in the morning without paying. If the members of the Masorti movement wanted to pray after this time, they had to pay the approximately $6 fee (25 NIS) charged to visit the archeological site. In April 2006 the Masorti movement petitioned the High Court regarding the fee. On February 12, 2007, the Masorti movement withdrew its petition after reaching an agreement with the Government that extended the hours allotted for free access to the Robinson Arch for the purpose of prayer.

The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center began construction in 2004 of a $150 million Center for Human Dignity and Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem. The Wiesenthal Center began building on the site of a municipal parking lot, which local officials had built in the 1960s over part of a centuries-old Muslim cemetery. Supporters of the Wiesenthal Center cited an 1894 ruling by the Shari'a court at the time, which stated that because the cemetery was abandoned, it was no longer sacred. During the reporting period, builders unearthed hundreds of skeletons and skeletal remains. After several Muslim organizations petitioned the High Court to stop construction, the court ordered the sides to arbitration and issued an injunction stopping construction work. The arbitration failed, and in January 2007 the High Court ordered the Wiesenthal Center and the Jerusalem Municipality to explain why they should be allowed to construct a museum on the site of an ancient Muslim cemetery. The case was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of U.S. citizen minors who had 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 1977 anti-proselytizing law prohibits any person from offering or receiving material benefits as an inducement to conversion.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

During the reporting period, terrorist organizations, including Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, carried out several attacks against Jewish Israelis. Terrorists sometimes accompanied the attacks with anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In December 2006 the National Police promoted Jamal Hakrush, a Muslim, to the position of Assistant Commander, the highest rank ever attained by an Israeli-Arab Muslim. In January 2007 Ghaleb Majadle, a Muslim member of the Labor Party, became the first-ever Muslim cabinet minister during a reshuffling of cabinet posts. In addition, for the first time since the establishment of the state, the appointment of an Arab Christian as a permanent justice of the High Court occurred in 2004.

According to Government data, the number of non-Jewish directors on the boards of state-owned companies increased from 5.5 percent in 2002 to 10 percent in 2006. As of November 2006, according to the Government, Arabs comprised 54 of the approximately 550 board seats of 105 state-run companies.

In June 2006 the 35th World Zionist Congress passed a resolution obligating the Jewish Agency to include Israeli-Arab communities in its development plans for the country. The agency has never been active before in the Arab and Druze communities. The resolution's proponents succeeded through a rare collaborative effort between Reform and Orthodox groups, who combined to overcome the opposition of delegates from some political parties, including Kadima, Herut, and Yisrael Beiteinu. During the summer 2006 conflict with Hizballah, the Jewish Agency provided relief to Muslim and Christian children in the Galilee—where most of Hizballah's rockets landed—by sending them to summer camps outside of the conflict zone. In the aftermath of the conflict, the Jewish Agency collaborated with other donors to rehabilitate Israeli-Arab communities in the north.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Relations among religious and ethnic groups—between Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and Christians, Arabs and non-Arabs, secular and religious Jews, and among the different streams of Judaism—often were strained. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews were the result of historical grievances as well as cultural and religious differences, and they were compounded by governmental and societal discrimination against Israeli-Arabs, both Muslim and Christian. These tensions were heightened by the summer 2006 conflict with Hizballah and the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which included terrorist attacks targeting Jewish civilians, IDF operations in the Occupied Territories, incidents of Jewish militants targeting Israeli-Arabs, and incidents of Israeli-Arab involvement in terrorist activity.

Numerous NGOs in the country were dedicated to promoting Jewish-Arab coexistence and interfaith understanding. Their programs included events to increase productive contact between religious groups and to promote Jewish-Arab dialogue and cooperation. These groups and their events have had varying degrees of success. Interfaith dialogue often was linked to the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians and between the country and its Arab neighbors. A variety of NGOs existed that sought to build understanding and create dialogue between religious groups and between religious and secular Jewish communities. Several examples were the Gesher Foundation (Hebrew for "bridge"); Meitarim, which operates a pluralistic Jewish-oriented school system; and the Interreligious Coordinating Council, which promoted interfaith dialogue among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian institutions.

Animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the period covered by this report. Non-Orthodox Jews have complained of discrimination and intolerance by members of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups. Persons who consider themselves Jewish but who are not considered Jewish under Orthodox law particularly complained of discrimination. As in past years, ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem and other ultra-Orthodox enclaves threw rocks at passing motorists driving on the

Sabbath and periodically harassed or assaulted women whose appearance they considered immodest.

Throughout society, attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion generally were negative. Many Jews were opposed to missionary activity directed at Jews, and some were hostile toward Jewish converts to Christianity. The Messianic Jewish and Jehovah's Witnesses communities accused Yad L'achim, a Jewish religious organization opposed to missionary activity, of harassing and occasionally assaulting its members. In October 2006 the Chief Rabbi of Rehovot's Ethiopian community warned that if a Christian group in the Tel Aviv suburb did not cease its activities, community members would bomb its headquarters. The Rabbi accused the mission of tricking and bribing Ethiopian Jews into conversion. Rehovot's Chief Rabbi joined the Ethiopian Rabbi's demand that the municipality evict the group. Christian and Muslim Israeli-Arab religious leaders complained that missionary activity that leads to conversions frequently disrupts family coherence in their communities.

In May 2006 vandals spray painted approximately 20 swastikas on the ark, Torah scroll, and walls of the great synagogue in the city of Petah Tikva. On January 29, 2007, police arrested six juveniles from the town of Bat Yam and charged them with the Petah Tikva crime and other acts of anti-Semitic vandalism. According to press reports, the youths—new immigrants from the former Soviet Union—admitted to belonging to a neighborhood-based satanic cult. On December 1, 2006, vandals destroyed property and painted swastikas on an ultra-Orthodox Jewish school in Acre.

An observer reported that a group of approximately 200 ultra-Orthodox Jews violently disrupted the religious service of a Messianic congregation in Be'er Sheva on December 24, 2005. According to the account, the group pushed and slapped the congregation's pastor and damaged property. Police dispersed the mob. On December 26, 2005, the observer filed a report with the Be'er Sheva police. Members of the congregation subsequently filed charges against the assailants. The Be'er Sheva District Court scheduled the case for trial on October 8, 2007.

Members of the Messianic Jewish community in Arad reported suffering verbal harassment and physical violence at the hands of ultra-Orthodox Jews. In July 2005 the Messianic congregation in Arad published a letter in Iton HaTzvi that reported harassment by members of an ultra-Orthodox community. In September 2005 the High Court heard a petition by ultra-Orthodox Jews seeking the right to demonstrate at the house of a family of Messianic Jews and reversal of a police decision prohibiting such a demonstration. At end of the reporting period there was no further information on a court ruling. According to Messianic Jews resident in Arad, since 2004 the Gur Hassidim have demonstrated regularly in front of the homes of Christians and Messianic Jews in Arad to protest alleged Christian proselytizing by this group. In interviews with Ha'aretz newspaper on November 14, 2006, the mayor and several officials of Arad objected to Messianic Jews in their city but acknowledged having no legal basis to expel them.

In August 2005 police arrested Shimon Ben Haim and Victoria Shteinman for desecrating a Muslim holy site by throwing a pig's head, wrapped in a Keffiyeh with "Mohammed" written on it, into the courtyard of a mosque near Tel Aviv. Ben Haim and Shteinman were subsequently convicted of insulting a religion. On December 6, 2006, Ben Haim was sentenced to 9 months' imprisonment and Shteinman was sentenced to 2 months' community service.

In May 2006 Israeli youths celebrating the holiday of Lag Ba'Omer, a day traditionally marked by the lighting of bonfires, allegedly attempted to set fire to an abandoned mosque in the northern city of Acre. The individuals claimed they were simply preparing to light a bonfire, but police found indications of attempted arson. The case was closed at the end of 2006 with none of the individuals publicly identified.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom problems with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy consistently raised problems of religious freedom with the Foreign Ministry, the police, the Prime Minister's office, and other Government agencies.

Embassy officials maintain a dialogue with NGOs that follow human and civil rights problems, including religious freedom, and promote interfaith initiatives. Embassy representatives also attended and spoke at meetings of such organizations, including the Arab Association for Human Rights, the Mossawa Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Israel Religious Action Center, and Adalah.

THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (INCLUDING AREAS SUBJECT TO THE JURISDICTION OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY)

The Palestinian Authority (PA) does not have a Constitution; however, the Palestinian Basic Law provides for freedom of religion, and the PA generally respected this right in practice. The Basic Law states that Islam is the official religion but also calls for respect and sanctity for other "heavenly" religions and that the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) shall be the main source of legislation.

There was little change in the status of the PA's respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. On June 17, 2007, PA President Mahmoud Abbas swore in a new PA Government led by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. President Abbas took steps to eliminate religious incitement, although some incidents of incitement still occurred. There were unconfirmed reports of Christians being targeted for extortion or abuse during the period covered by this report, and the PA did not take action to investigate these injustices allegedly perpetrated by PA officials.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal, military, and economic control in the Occupied Territories. Israel has no Constitution; however, the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty provides for freedom of worship. The Israeli Government generally respects this right in practice in the Occupied Territories. However, Israel's strict closure policies frequently restricted the ability of Palestinians to reach places of worship and to practice their religions.

The construction of a separation barrier by the Government of Israel, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, severely limited access to mosques, churches, and other holy sites, and seriously impeded the work of religious organizations that provide education, healthcare, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians. Such impediments were not exclusive to religious believers or to religious organizations, and at times the Israeli Government made efforts to lessen the impact on religious communities. The Israeli Government confiscated land belonging to several religious institutions to build its separation barrier. Most Palestinians and religious institutions refuse compensation due to the widespread perception that accepting compensation legalizes the confiscation of land and building of the barrier. According to the Israeli Government, it sought to build the barrier on public lands where possible, and when private land was used, provided opportunities for compensation. In principle, compensation is offered automatically with every confiscation order; however, owners need to go through an appeals process. The value of the compensation is not automatic and is subject to appraisal and verification.

Christians and Muslims generally enjoyed good relations, although tensions existed. Existing societal tensions between Jews and non-Jews remained high during the reporting period, and continuing violence heightened those tensions. The violence that occurred after the outbreak of the second Intifada (or uprising) in October 2000 significantly impacted 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 had no contact with the previous PA governments led by Hamas and was unable to discuss religious freedom problems with the PA as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government did have contact with President Abbas.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Gaza Strip has an area of 143 square miles and a population of 1.3 million. The West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) has an area of 2,238 square miles, and its population is 2.4 million persons, not including approximately 250,000 Israelis. East Jerusalem has an area of 27 square miles, and its population is 415,000, including approximately 180,000 Israelis.

Approximately 98 percent of Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories are Sunni Muslims. The total number of Christians is 200,000. Other estimates placed the Christian community between 40,000 and 90,000 persons. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox; the remainder consists of Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Protestants, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Copts, Maronites, and Ethiopian Orthodox denominations. Christians are concentrated primarily in the areas of Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem, but smaller communities exist elsewhere, including in Gaza. According to municipal officials in Bethlehem, since 2002 approximately 2,800 Christians from the Bethlehem area have left the West Bank for other countries. According to Christian leaders, most left for economic and security reasons. Low birth rates among Palestinian Christians and the impact of the separation barrier also contribute to their shrinking numbers. There is also a community of approximately 400 Samaritans located on Mount Gerazim near Nablus in the West Bank.

Adherents of several denominations of evangelical Christians, as well as members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, reside in the West Bank. Foreign missionaries operate in the Occupied Territories, including a small number of evangelical Christian pastors who reportedly sought to convert Muslims to Christianity. While they maintained a generally low profile, the PA was aware of their activities and generally did not restrict them.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The PA does not have a Constitution; however, the Basic Law provides for religious freedom, and the PA generally respected this right in practice. The PA sought to protect religious freedom in full and did not tolerate its abuse by either governmental or private actors. In previous years, there were credible reports that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with criminal elements to extort property illegally from Christian landowners in the Bethlehem area. Christian landowners in Bethlehem continued to claim that their property was being taken from them illegally.

The Basic Law states that "Islam is the official religion in Palestine," and that "respect and sanctity of all other heavenly religious groups [i.e., Judaism and Christianity] shall be maintained." In 2002 the Basic Law was approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and signed by then-President Yasir Arafat. The Basic Law states that the principles of Shari'a are "the main 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, including evangelical, churches established between the late 19th century and 1967, which, although they exist and operate, are not recognized officially by the PA; and a small number of churches that have become active within the last decade and whose legal status is less certain.

The first group of churches is governed by 19th century status quo agreements reached with Ottoman authorities, which the PA respects, and that 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 and some property matters. Civil courts do not adjudicate such matters.

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 to their efforts to obtain recognition, both from Muslims, who oppose their proselytizing, and from Christians, who fear the new arrivals may disrupt the status quo. However, these churches generally operate unhindered by the PA.

The PA requires Palestinians to declare their religious affiliation on identification papers and strongly enforces this requirement. Either Islamic or Christian ecclesiastical courts must handle all legal matters relating to personal status, if such courts exist for the individual's denomination. In general all matters related to personal status (i.e., inheritance, marriage, and divorce) are handled by such courts, which exist for Muslim and Christians.

All legally recognized individual sects are empowered to adjudicate personal status matters, and in practice most did so. The PA does not have a civil marriage law. Legally, members of one religious group mutually may agree to submit a personal status dispute to a different denomination to adjudicate, but in practice this did not occur. Churches that are not officially recognized by the PA must obtain special permission to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status matters; however, in practice nonrecognized churches advised 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. In the West Bank and Gaza, the PA has a Ministry of Awqaf 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 West Bank; these areas are generally under Israeli control. The Government of Jordan maintains responsibility for Waqf institutions in Jerusalem.

The PA requires the teaching of religion 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 Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) revised its primary and secondary school textbooks. A U.S. Government funded review of Palestinian textbooks concluded that the textbooks did not cross the line into incitement but continued to show elements of imbalance, bias, and inaccuracy. Critics noted the new textbooks often ignored historical Jewish connections to Israel and Jerusalem.

PA President Abbas had informal advisors on Christian affairs. Six seats in the 132-member PLC are reserved for Christians; there are no seats reserved for members of any other faith. The following holy days are considered national holidays: Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Zikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiya, Christmas, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Christians take Easter as a fully paid religious holiday.

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 Convention and the 1949 Geneva Convention relating to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War. The Israeli Government considers only the 1907 Hague Convention applicable but maintains that it largely observes the Geneva Convention's humanitarian provisions. The Israeli Government applies Israeli law to East Jerusalem, which it annexed after 1967; however, the U.S. Government considers Jerusalem a permanent status issue to be resolved in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

PA Government policy contributed to the generally free practice of religion, although problems persisted. The Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary) contains the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, among the holiest sites in Islam. Jews refer to the same place as the Temple Mount and consider it the location of the ancient Jewish temple. The location has been, as with all of East Jerusalem, under Israeli control since 1967, when Israel captured the city (East Jerusalem was formally annexed in 1980, and thus Israel applies its laws to East Jerusalem). The Haram al-Sharif is administered, however, by the Islamic Waqf, a Jordanian-funded and administered Muslim religious trust for East Jerusalem with ties to the PA. The Israeli police have exclusive control of the Mughrabi Gate entrance to the compound and limit access to the compound from all entrances. The Waqf can object to entrance of particular persons, such as non-Muslim religious radicals, or to prohibited activities, such as prayer by non-Muslims or disrespectful clothing or behavior, but lacks effective authority to remove anyone from the site. In practice Waqf officials claimed that police often allowed religious radicals (such as Jews seeking to remove the mosques and to rebuild the ancient temple on the site) and immodestly dressed persons to enter and often were not responsive to enforcing the site's rules. During Passover in 2007, Israeli police escorted more than 100 activists affiliated with the right-wing group "The Temple Mount Faithful" to enter the compound on 2 consecutive days, the second day while carrying a model of the Second Temple.

Non-Muslims may visit the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, with advance coordination with Waqf officials. The Israeli Government, as a matter of stated policy, has opposed worship at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount by non-Muslims since 1967. Israeli police generally did not permit public prayer by non-Muslims and publicly indicated that this policy has not changed in light of the renewed visits of non-Muslims to the compound. However, Waqf officials contended that Israeli police, in contravention of their stated policy and the religious status quo, have allowed members of radical Jewish groups to enter and to worship at the site, including during Passover 2007. Representatives for these Jewish groups claimed successful attempts to pray inside the compound in interviews with the Israeli media. The Waqf interpreted police actions as part of an Israeli policy to incrementally reduce Waqf authority over the site and to give non-Muslims rights of worship in parts of the compound.

There were several violent clashes during the reporting period between Israeli police and Muslim worshippers on the Haram al-Sharif, which Waqf officials alleged were due to the large police contingent kept on the site. At times Muslim worshippers threw stones at police, and police fired tear gas and stun grenades at worship-

pers. Muslim worshippers also held demonstrations at the site to protest reported right-wing Israeli nationalist plans to damage the mosques or create a Jewish worship area at the site. Israeli security officials and police were generally proactive and effective in dealing with such threats.

Citing violence and security concerns, the Israeli Government has imposed a broad range of strict closures and curfews throughout the Occupied Territories since October 2000. These restrictions largely continued during the reporting period and resulted in significantly impeded freedom of access to places of worship in the West Bank for Muslims and Christians.

The Israeli Government prevented most Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza from reaching the Haram al-Sharif by prohibiting their entry into Jerusalem. Restrictions were often placed on entry into the Haram al-Sharif for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, especially males under the age of 45. During the clashes surrounding the excavations at the Mughrabi Gate ramp in 2007, males under the age of 50 were prohibited entry to the Haram al-Sharif.

There were also disputes between the Muslim administrators of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Israeli authorities regarding Israeli restrictions on Waqf attempts to carry out repairs and physical improvements on the compound and its mosques. Israeli authorities prevented the Waqf from conducting several improvement projects and removing debris from previous restorations to the site, alleging that the Waqf was attempting to alter the nature of the site or to discard antiquities of Jewish origin. Israeli authorities began excavations near the Mughrabi gate, preparing to build a permanent ramp onto the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Waqf officials were not allowed access to the excavations in early 2007 and claimed they were not consulted in any part of the planning process for either the excavations or the ramp that will be constructed to replace the existing ramp. At the end of this reporting period, the excavations were suspended.

Personal status law for Palestinians is based on religious law. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from Shari'a, while various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status matters for Christians. A 1995 PA presidential decree stipulated that all laws in effect before the advent of the PA would continue in force until the PA enacted new laws or amended the old ones. Therefore, in the West Bank, which was formerly under Jordanian rule, the Shari'a-based Jordanian Status Law of 1976 governs women's status (among other matters). Under that 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 did so. Prior to marriage, a woman and man may stipulate terms in the marriage contract that govern financial and child custody matters in the event of divorce. Reportedly, few women used this section of the law.

Women generally are discouraged from including divorce arrangements in a marriage contract as a result of social pressure. The PA personal status law states that child custody for children below the age of 18 is given to the mother. Child support and "divorce benefits" are also guaranteed by law. It is also customary that a sizable sum of a deferred dowry is documented in the marriage contract. Personal status law in Gaza is Shari'a-based as interpreted in Egypt; however, similar versions of the attendant restrictions on women described above apply there as well.

The Israeli Government, citing security concerns, has continued since 2002 to construct a barrier to separate most of the West Bank from Israel, East Jerusalem, and Israeli settlement blocks. Construction of the barrier has involved confiscation of property owned by Palestinians, displacement of Christian and Muslim residents, and tightening of restrictions on movement for non-Jewish communities. There were several reports of land being taken along the barrier's route without compensation under the Absentee Property Statute or military orders. The Israeli Government asserted that it has mechanisms to compensate landowners for all takings, but specific cases document the exceptional difficulty Palestinians had in proving their land ownership to the standards demanded by Israeli courts.

Construction of the separation barrier continued in and around East Jerusalem during the reporting period, seriously restricting access by West Bank Muslims and Christians to holy sites in Jerusalem and in the West Bank. The barrier also negatively affected access to schools, healthcare providers, and other humanitarian services provided by religious institutions, although in some cases the Government made efforts to lessen the impact on religious institutions.

The separation barrier made it particularly difficult for Bethlehem-area Christians to reach the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and it made visits to Christian sites in Bethany and in Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who live on the other side of the barrier, further fragmenting and dividing this small minority community. Foreign pilgrims sometimes experienced difficulty in obtaining access to Christian holy sites in the West Bank because of the barrier and

Israeli restrictions on movement in the West Bank. The barrier and checkpoints also impeded 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. On November 15, 2005, Israel opened a new crossing terminal from Jerusalem into Bethlehem for both tourists and nontourists. After initial complaints of long lines, the Israeli Government instituted new screening procedures and agreed to ease access into Bethlehem during the Christmas holiday season, with restrictions eased from December 24 to January 19. For example, the PA reported 30,000 visitors to the Church of the Nativity for various Christmas celebrations on December 24–25, 2005, the largest turnout since 2000. Bethlehem business owners estimated tourist numbers near 12,000 for 2006.

The Government of Israel has constructed a barrier around Rachel's Tomb, a shrine holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. While Jewish visitors had regular unimpeded access, Palestinian access to Rachel's Tomb remained severely limited.

The barrier in Bethany blocks the annual Orthodox Palm Sunday procession from Lazarus' Tomb in Bethany to the Old City of Jerusalem, but Israel constructed a crossing terminal to allow foreign pilgrims and Christians living on the West Bank side of the barrier to participate in the procession. The terminal allows restricted access through the barrier.

Israeli closure policies 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. The Israeli Government's closure policy prevented several Palestinian religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, from reaching their congregations. Muslim and Christian clergy reported problems accessing religious sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. While the Israeli Government makes special arrangements on religious holidays for both Christians and Muslims, the main complaint remained inadequate free access arrangements in terms of number of permits issued and lack of smooth access.

During the reporting period, Palestinian violence against Israeli settlers prevented some Israelis from reaching Jewish holy sites in the Occupied Territories, such as Joseph's Tomb near Nablus. Since early 2001, following the outbreak of the Intifada, the Israeli Government has prohibited Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under the civil and security control of the PA. This restriction prevented Israeli Arabs from visiting Muslim and Christian holy sites in the West Bank, and it prevented Jewish Israelis from visiting other sites, including an ancient synagogue in Jericho. Visits to the Jericho synagogue have been severely curtailed as a result of disagreements between Israel and the PA over security arrangements.

Settler violence against Palestinians prevented some Palestinians from reaching holy sites in the Occupied Territories. Settlers in Hebron have in previous reporting periods forcibly prevented Muslim muezzins from reaching the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs to sound the call to prayer and have harassed Muslim worshippers in Hebron. Settler harassment of Palestinians in Hebron was a regular occurrence in this reporting period. The Israeli Government did not effectively respond to settler-initiated blocking of Muslim religious sites.

While there were no specific restrictions placed on Palestinians making the Hajj, all Palestinians faced restrictions, such as closures and long waits at Israeli border crossings, which often impeded travel for religious purposes. Palestinians generally were not allowed to use Ben-Gurion Airport. If residents of the Occupied Territories obtained a Saudi Hajj visa, they had to travel by ground to Amman (for West Bankers) or Egypt (for Gazans) and then to Saudi Arabia.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Israeli Government gives preferential treatment to Jewish residents of the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem, when granting permits for home building and civic services. For example, East Jerusalem's 270,000 Palestinian residents, who represent 33 percent of the municipality's population and pay 30 percent of the taxes, receive only 10 percent of the municipal budget. Palestinians do not recognize Israeli control of East Jerusalem and thus generally choose not to vote in municipal elections and are therefore not represented in the municipal council. Many of the national and municipal policies in Jerusalem are designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem. 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 while simultaneously permitting Jewish settlement in predominantly Palestinian areas in East Jerusalem.

Throughout the reporting period, Israeli authorities required that Christian clergy serving in the West Bank or Jerusalem, except some of those covered by the status quo agreement or who are affiliated with recognized nongovernmental organization (NGOs), leave the country every 90 days to renew their tourist visas, disrupting their work and causing financial difficulties to their sponsoring religious organizations. Catholic and Orthodox priests, nuns, and other religious workers, often from Syria and Lebanon, faced long delays and sometimes were denied applications. The Israeli Government indicated that delays or denials were due to security processing for visas and extensions. The shortage of foreign clergy impeded the functioning of Christian congregations.

During Jewish holidays the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) closes to Muslims the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, the second most important mosque for Muslims in the Occupied Territories after Al Aqsa Mosque/Temple Mount. The IDF reopens the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron to Muslim worship for times other than during Jewish holidays. During the reporting period, Israeli officers at times prevented 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.

In previous reporting periods, the PA failed to halt several cases of seizures of Christian-owned land in the Bethlehem area by criminal gangs. In many cases criminal gangs reportedly used forged land documents to assert ownership of lands belonging to Christians. Police failed to investigate most of these cases. In two cases police arrested and then released the suspects on bail and allowed them to continue occupying the land in question. There were reports this reporting period that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with members of these gangs to seize land from Christians. Local religious and political leaders confirmed that no such attempts to seize Muslim-owned land took place.

In September 2006 a Christian resident of Bethlehem claimed unknown assailants threw Molotov cocktails at his home and car. He believed this was in retaliation for his criticism of the stealing of Christian land in the city. He complained that PA officials were not doing anything to apprehend the perpetrators.

The Qalqilya branch of the YMCA closed following a firebombing of its office by local Muslims in April 2006. Local Muslim leaders wrote to the Hamas-led municipal council demanding that the branch office close. During the reporting period, the YMCA offices remained closed as a result of this incident. Various political factions in the city condemned the incident, but no action was taken to reveal and punish the perpetrators.

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.

Anti-Semitism

Palestinian media frequently published and broadcast material criticizing the Israeli occupation, including dismissing Jewish connections to Jerusalem. In September 2005 Sheikh Taysir al-Tamimi, the Chief Justice and President of the Higher Shari'a Council, called the Israeli Government's claim of a Jewish connection to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount a "baseless lie" and a provocation to Muslims everywhere. Al-Tamimi also warned against the "Judaization" of Jerusalem. Rhetoric by Palestinian terrorist groups included expressions of anti-Semitism. Some Muslim religious leaders preached sermons on the official PA television station that included expressions of anti-Semitism. However, in October 2005, Israeli media quoted PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat's statement that the Iranian President's declaration that Israel should be wiped off the map was "unacceptable."

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. Also, the sermons of some Muslim imams occasionally included anti-Semitic messages, such as a May 13, 2005, sermon delivered by Sheikh Ibrahim Mudayris that ran on PA television, in which he compared Jews (in the context of land conflicts) to "a virus, like AIDS." In May 2005 media quoted PA Minister of Information Nabil Sh'ath as calling for Mudayris' suspension from the PA religious affairs ministry and Muslim Waqf, which employed Mudayris, and banned him from delivering Friday sermons. At the end of the reporting period, Mudayris was no longer delivering Friday sermons.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

Terrorists did not systematically attack anyone in the Occupied Territories for religious reasons, although criminal activity that might be linked to terrorism affected some Christians in the Gaza Strip. In June 2007 unknown marauders ransacked a Christian book in Gaza during the general disorder following the Hamas take-over of Gaza. Official PA authorities in the Hamas-controlled Government often failed to effectively investigate or prosecute religiously driven crimes committed by Muslim extremist vigilante groups in Gaza.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The PA does not officially sponsor interfaith dialogue; however, it sends representatives to meetings on improving interreligious relations and attempts to foster goodwill among religious leaders.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, primarily between Christians and Muslims. Relations between Jews and non-Jews often were strained as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as Israel's control of access to sites holy to Christians and Muslims. Relations among different branches of Judaism were also strained. Some non-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem have complained of discrimination and intolerance on the part of some Orthodox Jews.

Societal attitudes continued to be a barrier to conversions, especially for Muslims converting to Christianity; however, conversion is not illegal in the Occupied Territories. Muslim-Christian tension was minimal during this reporting period, and the few instances of Muslim-Christian violence usually appeared related to social or interfamily conflicts rather than religious disputes. Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians accused Israeli officials of attempting to foster animosity among Palestinians by exaggerating reports of Muslim-Christian tensions.

The PA has not taken sufficient action to remedy past harassment and intimidation of Christian residents of Bethlehem by the city's Muslim majority. The PA judiciary failed to adjudicate numerous cases of seizures of Christian-owned land in the Bethlehem area by criminal gangs. PA officials appear to have been complicit in property extortion of Palestinian Christian residents, as there were reports of PA security forces and judicial officials colluding with gang members in property extortion schemes. Several attacks against Christians in Bethlehem went unaddressed by the PA, but authorities investigated attacks against Muslims in the same area.

On September 16 and 17, 2006, seven churches in the West Bank and Gaza were attacked in protest against remarks Pope Benedict XVI made about Islam and the Prophet Mohammad. Palestinian leaders across the political spectrum condemned the attacks against churches, calling for unity among all Palestinians—Christian and Muslim.

There were numerous attacks in the Gaza Strip by extremist groups who went by variations of the name "Swords of Right, Swords of Justice, and Swords of Islam." PA police blamed Swords of Right for April 2007 attacks on five internet cafes, two music shops, a Christian bookstore, and the Gaza City American International School. Gunmen reportedly associated with a Salafist Muslim group attacked a Gazan elementary school sports festival sponsored by the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), citing the school's mixed-gender activities as contrary to Islamic teachings.

Israeli settler radio stations often depicted Arabs as subhuman and called for Palestinians to be expelled from the West Bank. Right-wing, pro-settler organizations such as Women in Green, and various Hebron-area publications, have published several cartoons that demonize Palestinians. Jewish settlers, acting either alone or in groups, engaged in assaulting Palestinians and destroying Palestinian property. Most instances of violence or property destruction reportedly committed against Palestinians did not result in arrests or convictions.

Interfaith romance was a sensitive issue. Most Christian and Muslim families in the Occupied Territories encouraged their children—especially their daughters—to marry within their respective religious groups. Couples who challenged this societal norm encountered considerable societal and familial opposition.

In March 2005 a dispute over the sale of property in Jerusalem's Old City owned by the Greek Orthodox Church to investors led a Holy Synod meeting in Istanbul to depose the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, Irineos I, in May 2005. Irineos I claimed that proceedings against him were illegal and refused to resign. While Greece, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority recognized the ousting of Irineos and the appointment of Theophilus III as his successor, the Government of Israel did

not. In November 2005 Theophilus appealed this issue to the Israeli High Court, and at the same time a ministerial committee was established to deal with the situation. At the end of the reporting period, the committee had not resolved the issue, and the Government of Israel continued to recognize the deposed Patriarch. The High Court was scheduled to hear the case in November 2007.

In general, established Christian groups did not welcome less-established churches. A small number of proselytizing groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christians, encountered opposition to their efforts to obtain recognition, both from Muslims, who opposed their proselytizing, and from Christians, who feared the new arrivals might disrupt the status quo.

Settlers from the Hebron area and the southern West Bank severely beat and threatened several international activists, including individuals from the Christian Peacemaker Teams that escort Palestinian children to school and protect Palestinian families from settler abuse. While the motives of the attackers were not clear, the activists believed that local Israeli police did not actively pursue the suspects and opposed the Christian Peacemaker Teams' presence in Palestinian villages.

There were instances of right-wing Israeli nationalists harassing Muslims. On several occasions, a group known as the Temple Mount Faithful 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, an act that Muslims considered provocative and offensive. Members of this organization were allowed access to the Haram a-Sharif/Temple Mount, including access to the Dome of the Rock, during Passover 2007.

The strong correlation between religion, ethnicity, and politics in the Occupied Territories at times imbues the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a religious dimension.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Prior to the establishment of the Hamas-led PA Governments in January 2006, U.S. officials discussed religious freedom matters with the PA as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In March 2007 the Hamas-led PA Government resigned and was replaced by a National Unity Government comprised of Hamas, Fatah, and independents. In June 2007, in the aftermath of the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, President Abbas appointed Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister and Fayyad formed a new Government. U.S. officials resumed contact with PA officials near the end of the reporting period. Contact has remained consistent with PA President Abbas and officials in the Office of the PA President and other officials in agencies directly under the authority of the PA President.

The U.S. Consulate regularly meets with religious representatives to ensure their legitimate grievances are reported and addressed. The Consulate maintains a high level of contact 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. U.S. officials had frequent contact with Islamic leaders throughout Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. The Consulate also maintained regular contact with leaders of the Christian, Baha'i, and Jewish communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank. During the reporting period, the Consul General and Consulate officers met with the Greek, Latin, and Armenian Patriarchs, leaders of the Syrian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Coptic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches, as well as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). U.S. officials also met with members of the Baha'i religious group and held frequent consultations with rabbis and other central figures from the Ultra-orthodox and other Jewish communities.

During the reporting period, the Consulate investigated a range of charges, including allegations of damage to places of worship, incitement, and allegations concerning access to holy sites. Consulate 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 raised the issue of seizure of Christian-owned land in discussions with PA officials.

JORDAN

The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion and faith in accordance with the customs that are observed in the Kingdom, unless

they violate public order or morality. The state religion is Islam. The Government prohibits conversion from Islam and proselytization of Muslims.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. In June 2006 the Government published the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in the Official Gazette, which, according to Article 93.2 of the Constitution, gives the Covenant the force of law. Article 18 of the ICCPR provides for freedom of religion (See Legal/Policy Framework). Despite this positive development, restrictions and some abuses continued. Members of unrecognized religious groups and converts from Islam face legal discrimination and bureaucratic difficulties in personal status cases. Converts from Islam additionally risk the loss of civil rights. Shari'a courts have the authority to prosecute proselytizers.

Relations between Muslims and Christians generally are good; however, adherents of unrecognized religions and Muslims who convert to other faiths face societal discrimination. Prominent societal leaders took steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,436 square miles and a population of 6.05 million. More than 92 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Official Government figures estimate that Christians make up 6 percent of the population; however, Government and Christian officials privately estimate the figure to be closer to 3 percent. According to representatives of the respective communities and newspaper reports, there are between 12,000 and 14,000 Druze, a small number of Shi'a Muslims, and approximately 1,000 Baha'is. There are no statistics available regarding the number of 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, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, Latter-day Saints, and Presbyterian churches. Other Christian groups include the Free Evangelicals, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assembly of God, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. There are a number of Chaldean and Syriac Christians and Shi'a among the estimated 250,000 to 450,000 Iraqis in the country, many of whom are undocumented or on visitor permits.

With few exceptions, there are no major geographic concentrations of religious minorities. The cities of Husn, in the north, and Fuheis, near Amman, are predominantly Christian. Madaba and Karak, both south of Amman, also have significant Christian populations. The northern part of the city of Azraq has a sizeable Druze population, as does Umm Al-Jamal in the governorate of Mafraq. There also are Druze populations in Amman and Zarka and a smaller number in Irbid and Aqaba. There are a number of nonindigenous Shi'a living in the Jordan Valley and the south. The Druze are registered as "Muslims" and, as they have their own court in Al Azraq, can administer their own personal status matters.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion and faith in accordance with the customs that are observed in the Kingdom, unless they violate public order or morality. According to the Constitution the state religion is Islam and the King must be Muslim. The Government prohibits conversion from Islam and proselytization of Muslims.

The Constitution, in Articles 103–106, provides that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims are the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts which apply Shari'a law in their proceedings. Personal status includes religion, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Personal status law follows the guidelines of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is applied to cases that are not explicitly addressed by civil status legislation. Matters of personal status of non-Muslims whose religion is recognized by the Government are the jurisdiction of Tribunals of Religious Communities, according to Article 108.

There is no provision for civil marriage or divorce. Some Christians are unable to divorce under the legal system because they are subject to their denomination's religious court system, which does not allow divorce. Such individuals sometimes convert to another Christian denomination or to Islam to divorce legally.

The head of the department that manages Shari'a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari'a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. All judicial nominations are approved by the Prime Minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. The Protestant denominations registered as "societies" come under the jurisdiction of one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals assigned for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions such as the Baha'i Faith. 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. According to the law, all minor children of male citizens who convert to Islam 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 also convert to Islam. In cases in which a Muslim converts to Christianity, the authorities do not recognize the conversion as legal, and the individual continues to be treated as a Muslim in matters of family and property law.

While Christianity is a recognized religion and non-Muslim citizens may profess and practice the Christian faith, churches must be accorded legal recognition through administrative procedures in order to own land and administer sacraments, including marriage. Churches and other religious institutions can receive official recognition by applying to the Prime Ministry. The Prime Minister unofficially confers with an interfaith council of clergy representing officially registered local churches on all matters relating to the Christian community, including the registration of new churches. The Government refers to the following criteria when considering official recognition of Christian churches: the faith must not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; it must be recognized by the Middle East Council of Churches; the faith must not oppose the national religion; and the group must include some citizen adherents. Groups that the Government deems to engage in practices that violate the law and the nature of society or threaten the stability of public order are prohibited; however, there were no reports of banned religious groups. The Government does not interfere with public worship by the country's Christian minority.

Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent of the Government and are tax-exempt. The Free Evangelicals, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assembly of God, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance, are registered with the Ministry of Interior as "societies" but not as churches

Public schools provide mandatory religious instruction for all Muslim students. Christian students are not required to attend courses that teach Islam. The Constitution provides that congregations have the right to establish schools for the education of their own communities "provided that they comply with the general provisions of the law and are subject to Government control in matters relating to their curriculums and orientation."

In June 2006 the Government published the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in the Official Gazette. According to Article 93.2 of the Constitution, acts published in the Official Gazette attain force of law. Article 18 of the Covenant states that everyone shall have the "right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," including freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom "to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching." Additionally, the Covenant stipulates that no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. The country ratified the ICCPR without reservations in 1976. However, Article 2, Section 2 of the ICCPR states that the Covenant is not self executing, and requires implementing legislation to give the Covenant effect. By the end of the reporting period, no such legislation had been proposed. Nevertheless, a senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the ICCPR's publication in the Official Gazette signifies that the Government considers the Covenant as a source of law alongside domestic law, including the Constitution and Shari'a (Islamic law). Articles 103–106 of the Constitution still provide that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims, including religion, are the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts which apply Shari'a (Hanafi) in their proceedings.

The Government-sponsored Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies organized several conferences and seminars to support its effort to provide a venue in the Arab world for the interdisciplinary study and rational discussion of religion and religious issues, with particular reference to Christianity in Arab and Islamic society. These included an international conference in January 2007 to debate a common approach

to reform in different religious traditions, a February 2007 seminar that addressed the role of religious traditions in the context of social and political modernization, and an April 2007 conference entitled "The 'Universal' in Human Rights: A Precondition for a Dialogue of Cultures."

Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's Ascension, the Islamic New Year, Christmas, and the Gregorian calendar New Year are celebrated as national holidays. Christians may request leave for other Christian holidays approved by the local Council of Bishops such as Easter and Palm Sunday.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were no reports that the practice of any faith was prohibited; however, the Government does not officially recognize all religious groups. Some religious groups, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, faced societal and official discrimination. In addition, not all Christian denominations have applied for or been accorded legal recognition.

The Government does not recognize the Druze or Baha'i Faiths as religions but does not prohibit their practice. The Druze face official discrimination, but do not complain of social discrimination. Baha'is face both official and social discrimination. On national identity cards which normally identify the bearer's religious community, the Government records Druze as Muslims, and indicates either no religion or Muslim for Baha'is. The Baha'i community does not have its own court to adjudicate personal status matters, such as inheritance and other family-related issues; such cases may be heard in Shari'a courts. Baha'i spouses face difficulty in obtaining residency permits for their non-Jordanian partners because the Government does not recognize Baha'i marriage certificates. 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 Baha'i cemetery in Adasieh is registered in the name of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

Employment applications for Government positions occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion. Christians serve regularly as cabinet ministers. Of the 110 seats of the lower house of Parliament, 9 are reserved for Christians. No seats are reserved for adherents of other religious groups. No seats are reserved for Druze, but they are permitted to hold office under their Government classification as Muslims.

The Government does not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Church of Christ, but each is allowed to conduct religious services without interference.

The Government recognizes Judaism as a religion; however, there are reportedly no citizens who are Jewish. The Government does not impose restrictions on Jews, and they are permitted to own property and conduct business in the country.

Because Shari'a governs the personal status of Muslims, converting from Islam to Christianity and proselytism of Muslims are not allowed. Muslims who convert to another religion face societal and governmental discrimination. Under Shari'a, converts are regarded as apostates and may be denied their civil and property rights. The Government maintains it neither encourages nor prohibits apostasy. The Government does not recognize converts from Islam as falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community's laws in matters of personal status; converts are still considered Muslims. Converts to Islam fall under the jurisdiction of Shari'a courts. Shari'a, in theory, provides for the death penalty for Muslims who apostatize; however, the Government has never applied such punishment. The Government allows conversion to Islam.

There is no statute that expressly forbids proselytism of Muslims; however, Government policy requires that foreign missionary groups refrain from public proselytism.

The Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), a Christian training school for pastors and missionaries, was registered with the Government and operates as a cultural center. JETS purchased land to build a new facility in 2003 and received permits to construct the buildings in September 2006. JETS is permitted to appoint faculty and administration, but the Government denies accreditation as an academic institution. Because JETS is not accredited, its students are not eligible for student visas but may enter the country on tourist visas of limited duration. The JETS program requires 4 years of study, and as a consequence many students overstay their visas; upon departure from the country they, and any family members who may have accompanied them, are required to pay two dollars for each day they spent without a visa (as are other visiting foreign nationals). The Government does not allow JETS to accept Muslim students.

According to JETS, during the reporting period the Government revoked JETS's nonprofit status, requiring the organization to pay 16 percent sales tax on all items purchased. In 2006 the Customs office confiscated a shipment of approximately 100 books ordered by JETS. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervened and secured the release of the books.

Parliamentary elections law historically has under represented urban areas that are centers of support for Islamist candidates.

The Political Parties Law prohibits houses of worship from being used for political activity. This stipulation was designed primarily to prevent Government opponents from preaching politically oriented sermons in mosques.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Trusts ("Awqaf") manages Islamic institutions and the construction of mosques. It also appoints imams, provides mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain activities sponsored by mosques. The Government monitors sermons at mosques and requires that preachers refrain from political commentary that could instigate social or political unrest.

Following the Summer 2006 Lebanon war, some Sunnis in the country reportedly converted to Shi'ism. In November 2006 the Government reportedly deported some Iraqi Shi'ites for practicing self-flagellation rituals at a Shi'ite shrine outside Amman. Some Sunni clerics alleged that Iraqi Shi'ites could be Iranian agents, and some sources reported that the alleged deportations were a result of Shi'a proselytizing. The credibility of these reports was not verified. The Government permits Shi'ites to worship but not to self-mutilate or to shed blood, as may occur in some Shi'ite ceremonies.

In January 2006 Jihad Al-Momani, former chief editor of the weekly newspaper *Shihan*, and Hussein Al-Khalidi, of the weekly *Al Mihar*, were arrested for printing controversial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. On February 5, 2006, the two men were charged by the Conciliation Court and the Court of First Instance with "denigrating the Prophets in public" and "insulting God." In May 2006 they received the minimum prison sentence of 2 months, but were immediately released on bail with the possibility that the sentences would be commuted to fines of $170 (JD 120) each. Their lawyer petitioned the sentence to the Court of Appeals and as of the end of the reporting period was still awaiting a decision.

Druze, Baha'is, and members of other unrecognized religious groups do not have their religious affiliations correctly noted on their national identity cards or "family books" (the family book is a national registration record that is issued to the head of every family and that serves as proof of citizenship). Baha'is have an "assembly" which officiates marriages; however, the Department of Civil Status and Passports (DCSP) does not recognize marriages conducted by Baha'i assemblies, and will not issue birth certificates for the children of these marriages or residence permits for partners who are not citizens. The DCSP issues passports on the basis of these marriages, but without entering the marriage into official records. The DCSP frequently records Baha'is and Druze as Muslims on identifying documents. Atheists must associate themselves with a recognized religion for purposes of official identification.

The Government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians (4 percent); however, all senior command positions are held by Muslims. Division-level commanders and above are required to lead Islamic prayer on certain occasions. There is no Christian clergy in the military.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On April 29, 2007, Government authorities reportedly deported Pastor Mazhar Izzat Bishay of the Aqaba Free Evangelical Church, an Egyptian national and longtime resident, to Egypt. It was reported that they had previously interrogated him and that they offered him no reason for his deportation. At the end of the reporting period, the credibility of these reports had not been verified.

In November 2006 the authorities deported Wajeeh Besharah, Ibrahim Atta, Raja Welson, Imad Waheeb, four Coptic Egyptians living in Aqaba, to Egypt. It was reported that the authorities questioned them about their affiliation with the Free Evangelical Church in Aqaba prior to their deportation. At the end of the reporting period, the credibility of this report had not been verified.

On January 20, 2006, a Shari'a court received an apostasy complaint against Mahmoud Abdel Rahman Mohammad Eleker, a convert from Islam to Christianity. On April 14, 2006, the complainant, the convert's brother-in-law, dropped the charges after the convert's wife renounced in the presence of a lawyer any claims she might have to an inheritance from her own parents. At the end of the reporting period, there was no further update on this case.

In September 2004, on the order of a Shari'a court, the authorities arrested a convert from Islam to Christianity and held him overnight on charges of apostasy. In

November 2004 a Shari'a court found the defendant guilty of apostasy. The ruling was upheld in January 2005 by a Shari'a appeals court. The verdict declared the convert to be a ward of the state, stripped him of his civil rights, and annulled his marriage. It further declared him to be without any religious identity. It stated that he lost all rights to inheritance and may not remarry his (now former) wife unless he returns to Islam, and forbade his being considered an adherent of any other religion. The verdict implies the possibility that legal and physical custody of his child could be assigned to someone else. The convert left the country, received refugee status, and was resettled in the United States.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees who remained in custody at 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.

Anti-Semitism

Editorial cartoons, articles, and opinion pieces critical of Israel and Israeli politics were frequently published in the local press. Anti-Semitic pieces occurred with much less frequency, and were usually the expressions of political columnists; they did not prompt a response from the Government.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On December 26, 2006, King Abdullah II convened his first meeting with evangelical leaders. Attendees reported that this event offered a sense of hope and progress towards continued interfaith dialogue.

The Baptist Church applied for official registration with the Ministry of Interior on December 12, 2006. In June 2006 the Prime Ministry denied the Church's application. No additional information regarding the reason for denial was available by the end of the reporting period. The Assemblies of God Church also applied for official registration with the Ministry of Interior on April 10, 2007. Its application was under consideration at the end of the period covered by this report.

In June 2006 the Government published the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in the Official Gazette. Article 18 of the Covenant provides for freedom of religion. (See Legal/Policy Framework).

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Baha'is faced some societal discrimination.

Muslims who convert to other religions often face social ostracism, threats, and abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. Parents usually strongly discourage young adults from pursuing interfaith romantic relationships, because they may lead to conversion. Such relationships may lead to ostracism and, in some cases, violence against the couple or feuds between members of the couple's families. When such situations arise, families may approach local government officials for resolution. In the past, there were reports that in some cases local government officials encouraged Christian women involved in relationships with Muslim men to convert to Islam to defuse potential family or tribal conflict and keep the peace; however, during the period covered by this report, no such cases were reported.

During the reporting period, local newspapers occasionally published articles critical of Christian evangelical organizations.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government actively promotes religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials raised religious freedom and other human rights issues with Government authorities on a number of occasions via formal inquiry and discussion. Embassy officers met frequently with members of the various religious and missionary communities, as well as with private religious organizations.

The U.S. Embassy sponsored many individuals on exchange programs related to religious freedom and tolerance. In February 2007 the U.S. Government, in conjunction with the Jordan Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC), sponsored five clerics and religious scholars to travel to the United States to examine the compatibility of religious practice with democratic social and political structures, and to promote the benefits of mutually respectful coexistence through dialogue with U.S.-based religious and civic leaders.

From November 13 to December 1, 2006, a former Assistant Director of the Women's Affairs Section at the Ministry of Awqaf and member of the JICRC traveled to the U.S. on a regional project entitled "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue." From October 28 to November 18, 2006, the Embassy also sponsored the second annual International Visitor Program designed to expose Shari'a judges to the diversity, religious tolerance, and freedom of U.S. society, including by meeting religious leaders from several religious groups and U.S officials who raised religious freedom concerns.

In the summer of 2006 a Fulbright scholar studied for 6 weeks at the University of California at Santa Barbara on a U.S.-funded project entitled "Religious Pluralism in the United States." This scholar, a dean at a major Jordanian university, returned to his faculty and students with an appreciation of how American society, culture, and institutions allow varied religious beliefs to coexist.

The U.S. Department of State continued its multiphase exchange program to bring U.S. religious leaders to the country and to send imams and other national religious leaders to the United States for outreach activities aimed at grassroots communities and youth.

KUWAIT

The Constitution provides for "absolute freedom" of belief and for freedom of religious practice in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals; however, the Government placed some limits on the right of free religious practice. The Constitution states that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is a main source of legislation.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Freedom of belief was respected and the Government did not intervene in worship services; however, non-Sunni Muslims found it difficult or impossible to attain legal permission to establish new places of worship.

Regional events led to increased Sunni-Shi'a tensions during the period covered by this report, but did not translate into confrontation. Religious minorities experienced some discrimination as a result of governmental policies.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy sent religious leaders to the United States on professional exchange programs and worked with religious leaders and Government officials on specific issues related to religious rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 6,880 square miles and a population of 3.2 million, of whom 1 million are citizens, and the rest foreign workers and their families. More than 100,000 stateless residents, known as "Bidoon," either have no documentation of their citizenship or are unwilling to disclose their nationality. Estimates derived from voting records and personal status documents indicate that 70 percent of citizens, including the ruling family, belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The national census did not distinguish between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. Most of the remaining 30 percent of citizens are Shi'a Muslims. There are approximately 150 to 200 Christian citizens and a small number of Baha'i citizens. Some 100,000 of noncitizen residents are Shi'a. While some areas have relatively high concentrations of Sunnis or Shi'a, most areas of the country are fairly well integrated religiously.

The Christian population, comprised mostly of expatriates, is estimated to at be more than 400,000. The Christian community includes: the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church with approximately 100 members (several thousand other Christians also used the Anglican church for worship services); Armenian Orthodox Church with approximately 4,000 members; Coptic Orthodox Church with at least 65,000 members; Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church with approximately 1,000 to 2,000 members (Greek Catholics worship in a rented house, not at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait City); Greek Orthodox Church (referred to in Arabic as the Roman Orthodox Church, a reference to the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium) with an estimated 3,500 members; National Evangelical (Protestant) Church with more than 70 congregations serving approximately 40,000; and the Roman Catholic Church, with 2 official churches and a third worship facility in a rented house, with an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 members (Latin, Maronite, Coptic Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Malabar, and Malankara congregations all worshipped at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait City).

There are many other unrecognized Christian religious groups, although reliable estimates of their numbers are not available. These include: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Indian Orthodox Syrian Church, Mar Thoma, and Seventh-day Adventists.

There are also communities of Baha'is (400 adherents), Buddhists (100,000), Hindus (300,000), and Sikhs (10,000).

Protestant missionaries in the country serve non-Muslim congregations. The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing to Muslims, and there were no cases of foreign missionaries violating this prohibition.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for "absolute freedom" of belief and for freedom of religious practice in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals.

The Government exercises direct control of Sunni religious institutions, whose members account for the majority of citizens. For example, the Government appoints Sunni imams and monitors their Friday sermons and pays the salaries of mosque staff. The Government also finances the building of Sunni mosques. The Government does not exert this control over Shi'a mosques, and Shi'a fund their own mosques.

The 2006 Press and Publications Law specifically prohibits the publication of any material that attacks religious groups or incites persons to commit crimes, creates hatred, or spreads dissension among the public. The law increased the existing fines and jail sentences for those who publish material denigrating Islam. It also expanded the scope of what cannot be criticized to include the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. There are laws against blasphemy, apostasy, and proselytizing. While the number of incidents to which these laws apply is limited, the Government actively enforces them, especially the prohibition on non-Muslim proselytizing of Muslims.

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), the Municipality of Kuwait (for building permits and land concerns), and the Ministry of Interior (for security and police protection for places of worship). While reportedly there was no official Government list of recognized churches, seven Christian churches—National Evangelical, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Coptic Orthodox, Roman Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Armenian Orthodox—had at least some form of official recognition enabling them to operate openly. These seven churches had open files at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, allowing them to bring in religious workers and staff to operate their churches, as well as guest lecturers and other visitors.

The procedures for registration and licensing of religious groups appear to be similar to those for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There were hundreds of unlicensed, informal NGOs, clubs, and civic groups in the country. No religious group received official recognition during the period covered by this report, and unrecognized Christian groups perceived it as impossible to gain official recognition. They therefore worshiped at unofficial, private spaces or borrowed the worship spaces of existing groups. The Government did not interfere with such private gatherings.

In 2005 the Government completed the removal of all street-side Islamic charity boxes due to difficulty monitoring and confirming whether the funds were diverted to uses other than the stated charitable cause. The Charitable Organizations and Philanthropic Society Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) is responsible for regulating the activities of religious charities operating in the country, approving registration requests, and monitoring their day-to-day operations. Charities may collect cash only during the month of Ramadan using MOSAL-approved coupons. At other times, charities may collect funds through electronic transfers to MOSAL- and Central Bank of Kuwait-approved accounts directly registered to the charity.

The Higher Advisory Committee on Completion of the Application of Islamic Shari'a Provisions is tasked with preparing society for the full implementation of Shari'a in all fields. The committee makes recommendations to the emir on ways in which laws can be brought into better conformity with Shari'a, but it has no authority to enforce such changes. The Constitution states Shari'a is a main source of legislation.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Islamic New Year, Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Ascension of the Prophet, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha. Most Christians attended church on Fridays and did not cite the inability to go on Sunday as a religious concern. Some workers are able to arrange with their employers to have time on Sunday for worship. Private employers can decide whether to give their non-Muslim employees time off for their holidays.

The Government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools for all students. The Government also requires Islamic religious instruction in private schools that have one or more Muslim students.

The Government does not designate religion on passports or national identity documents.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Shi'a are free to worship according to their faith without Government interference, and the overall situation for Shi'a remained stable during the reporting period; however, there were problems. Members of the Shi'a community have expressed concern over a past attack on a Shi'a mosque, as well as the relative scarcity of Shi'a mosques due to the Government's slow approval of the construction of new mosques and repair of existing ones. (There are 35 Shi'a mosques compared to more than 1,000 Sunni mosques in the country.) Since 2001 the Government has granted licenses for and has approved the construction of six new Shi'a mosques. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs reported that in the future Shi'a mosques would be built in new residential areas in sufficient numbers to serve the Shi'a populations who move into these areas.

There are hundreds of Shi'a husseiniyas (Shi'a community gathering places) in the country, most of which are informal or unlicensed. Generally, the country's husseiniyas are privately owned and associated with prominent Shi'a families. Some Shi'as expressed concern about a proposal by the Municipal Council to impose more stringent regulations on husseiniyas. The Municipal Council controls access to Government land and has at times reportedly refused to grant land to non-Sunni Muslim religious institutions.

Shi'a who aspire to serve as imams (clergy) must seek training and education abroad (primarily in Iraq and Iran, and to a lesser degree in Syria), due to the lack of Shi'a jurisprudence courses at Kuwait University's College of Islamic Law. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Education was reviewing a Shi'a application to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics. Shi'a leaders called on the Ministry of Education to remove references from high school Islamic education textbooks specifically declaring some of their religious practices heretical. Sunni scholars author the books, which are entirely based on the Sunni interpretation of Islam. A governmental committee was formed to study the issue of removing references that are offensive to Shi'a Islam.

In 2006 one of the leading Shi'a imams in the country gave a Friday sermon that led Members of Parliament to demand that he be suspended. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs sent the imam a letter telling him to stop preaching. The imam continued preaching without Government interference.

In 2004 the Government permitted Shi'a to stage a public reenactment of the Battle of Karbala depicting the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, Muhammad's grandson, but denied a Shi'a request during 2005. In 2006 the Government allowed and provided security for public celebrations, marches, and reenactments during Ashura, without giving official permits. The Government did not permit public reenactments of the martyrdom of Hussein or public marches for the commemoration in 2007. The Government provided security to Shi'a neighborhoods, however, and allowed worshipers to gather peacefully in public spaces to participate in Ashura rituals.

Four Christian denominations are widely understood to enjoy full recognition by the Government and are allowed to operate as official churches: the Anglican Church, Coptic Orthodox, National Evangelical (Protestant), and Roman Catholic. These religious groups operated freely on their premises and held worship services without Government interference. Their leaders also stated that the Government generally was supportive of their presence, providing police security and traffic control as needed. Other Christian denominations (including Indian Orthodox, Mar Thoma, Mormons, and Seventh-day Adventists) were not legally recognized but were allowed to operate in rented villas, private homes, or the facilities of recognized churches. Members of these congregations reported that they were able to worship without Government interference provided that they did not disturb their neighbors or violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing.

Churches outside of the four recognized denominations are prohibited from displaying exterior signs, including a cross or the congregation's name, or engaging in other public activities, such as ringing bells. Some churches without the financial

resources to rent a location were able to gather in schools on the weekends, although representatives from the churches reported that the schools were pressured to stop allowing such gatherings.

The Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church had an open file at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Greek Catholics worshipped in a rented house (two other Indian Catholic denominations also used the house for worship services). In September 2005 there was an announcement that the Government had approved the Melkite Catholics' application for a plot of land to build a new church, although this decision had not been approved by all the relevant governmental institutions. After repeated delays, however, the Municipal Council rejected the Church's request outright. According to the Government, the application was rejected based on traffic concerns; however observers believe religious opposition to church-building was almost certainly the reason for refusal. The case could be appealed to the Council of Ministers (the cabinet), but bureaucratic delays during the reporting period prevented a final resolution of the case.

The Armenian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches were allowed to operate openly, hire employees, invite religious speakers, and conduct other such activities without Government interference; however, according to Government records, their facilities were registered as private homes. They also rented facilities from private citizens for worship services and other religious purposes. However, this placed them in a vulnerable position if the owner stops renting, since it is difficult to find landlords willing to rent to religious groups.

The Government imposed quotas on the number of the clergy and staff the seven recognized religious groups could bring into the country. Most churches found the quotas insufficient. Most of the groups considered their existing facilities inadequate to serve their respective communities. They faced significant problems in trying to build new facilities.

There is no specific law banning the establishment of non-Muslim places of worship; however, in practice the few groups that applied for licenses to build new places of worship were denied permission. Some religious groups understood this to mean that it is impossible to gain a license for a new place of worship and have therefore been deterred from applying.

The Government actively supports Sunni Muslim proselytism and does not allow conversion away from Islam. While such conversions reportedly occur, they do so quietly and discreetly. Known converts faced harassment, including loss of job, repeated summonses to police stations, arbitrary detention, physical and verbal abuse, police monitoring of their activities, and property damage without legal recourse. The Government did not prosecute anyone for converting from Islam. A Muslim who converted from Islam would face legal problems in personal status and property matters before the courts.

The Government forbids non-Muslim missionaries from working in the country and places limits on the number of religious leaders allowed to work for the few churches that have legal status. Religious leaders of unrecognized groups must come as nonreligious workers and perform their religious duties outside their regular employment.

Kuwaiti law prohibits denigration of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, and other Islamic religious figures.

The Government does not permit the establishment of non-Islamic religious publishing companies or training institutions for clergy. Nevertheless, several churches publish religious materials solely for their congregations' use. A private company, the Book House Company Ltd., was permitted to import Bibles and other Christian religious materials, including videotapes and compact discs, for use solely by Government-recognized church congregations and as long as the materials do not insult Islam. The Book House Company Ltd. was the only company that had an import license to bring in such materials, which require approval by Government censors.

There were reports of customs officials confiscating non-Islamic religious materials from private citizens upon their arrival at the airport. Some domestic workers reported that their employers confiscated religious articles such as Bibles and rosary beads, along with nonreligious items.

Bidoon (stateless) Arabs continued to face great difficulty in obtaining documents necessary to travel abroad, including for travel to participate in the Hajj. The Government declared in early 2006 and again in 2007 that it would facilitate the obtaining of travel documents by Bidoon but did not do so.

Shi'a remained underrepresented in upper levels of Government. In 2006 4 Shi'a were elected to the 50-member National Assembly, compared with 5 Shi'a in the previous assembly and 6 in the assembly before that. A new cabinet was formed in March 2007 after the resignation of the entire cabinet. The new Prime Minister retained one of the two Shi'a ministers from the previous cabinet, although with a

new portfolio, and added another Shi'a. There were no known Shi'a in the Kuwait State Security (KSS) forces, and they were reportedly underrepresented in the National Guard. Many Shi'a complained of a "glass ceiling" that prevents them from obtaining leadership positions. While such complaints were credible, they stem more from the decisions of individuals than a coordinated Government policy.

Personal status law is administered through religious courts, and 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. 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 issues. However, the court had not yet been established, according to an informed Shi'a Government official, because it was unable to identify sufficiently qualified Shi'a judges.

The Government approved another long-standing Shi'a request for the establishment of an independent Shi'a Waqf, an agency to administer religious endowments. The Shi'a Waqf was able to carry out its work freely, and the Government sponsored a conference on Ja'fari Waqf matters in March 2007.

Members of religious groups not sanctioned in the Qur'an, such as Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, may not build places of worship or other religious facilities. Unrecognized religious groups are allowed to worship privately in their homes without Government interference.

The Sikh community was able to worship freely in private homes. In past years they had used a rented apartment designated for worship, but the building was destroyed for reasons unrelated to the Sikhs' presence. The community reported that it had not been able to find another landlord willing to rent them a space to be used for religious purposes. They were unable to gain permission for a crematorium to cremate their deceased. Sikhs engaged in other religious activities, including public marriage and other celebrations, without Government interference.

The law prohibits organized religious education for religious groups other than Islam, although this law was not enforced rigidly. Informal religious instruction occurs inside private homes and on church compounds without Government interference; however, there were reports that Government inspectors from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs periodically visited public and private schools outside of church compounds to ensure that religious teaching other than Islam did not take place.

During the reporting period, the Government still had not responded to the request from the Catholic Church to permit Catholic students in certain private schools to study the Catechism separately during the period allotted for instruction in Islam.

In 2005 the National Evangelical Church requested a license for its school, which it has operated for several decades. After receiving approval from numerous governmental bodies, the Church's request was denied by the Municipal Council in 2006 amid erroneous media reports that the Church planned to take over a historic site for the school and use it for proselytizing. Press statements by Municipal Council members suggested the request was refused on ideological grounds rather than on zoning or other technical grounds. The Church did not pursue the license during the reporting period because it believed the Municipal Council was set against licensing of the school for ideological reasons.

The Catholic Church faced severe overcrowding at its two official church facilities. Its cathedral in downtown Kuwait City regularly drew tens of thousands of worshippers to its more than 20 weekly services in several languages. Due to limited space on the compound, the Church was unable to construct any new buildings. The National Evangelical Church, which served a weekly average of 20,000 worshippers in more than 70 congregations, was also significantly overcrowded. The Church wanted more land to build a new church but did not made an official request.

The Coptic Orthodox Church reported that it had excellent relations with the Government and faced no difficulties in bringing church workers and guests into the country. The Government was extremely cooperative in providing permits to erect tents on adjacent lots to handle the crowds during Christian holidays. The Church's main challenge was the overcrowding at its small compound facility in Kuwait City. The Government determined it would have to demolish the church building to make way for a new road but granted the Church 6,500 square meters of land in Hawally district to build a new place of worship; however, it did not offer any financial assistance to construct the new church. Construction began in the first quarter of 2006, and the Church expected construction to be completed in 2009. The Church agreed to move to a temporary facility when the road project began. When the Government proposed a temporary facility in the Kheitan neighborhood, Islamist politicians and writers and local residents complained vociferously. The Government de-

cided to work around the church building until the new facility is completed and the old one can be demolished.

The Government prohibits missionaries from proselytizing among Muslims; however, they may serve non-Muslim congregations.

The Government controls the content delivered by imams and preachers, who must sign a "mosque compact" detailing their commitment to stay within certain boundaries in their sermons. The Government banned a prominent Sunni imam from giving Friday sermons after he commented on politics in July 2006. The initial ban was for 3 months but was suspended after discussions between the imam and the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. The Government especially clamped down on preachers at unlicensed mosques and those who commented too directly on politics, relieving 20 imams of their duties in August 2006. Some Salafis complained that the preachers relieved of their duties by the Government were almost exclusively Salafis.

In April 2006 and again in April 2007, the Government banned a number of books from an Islamic book festival organized by the Social Reform Society, a religiously conservative NGO affiliated with the Kuwaiti branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The banned books were authored by or contained the writings of individuals associated with the Wahhabi/Salafi movement in Islam.

The Islam Presentation Committee (IPC), under the authority of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, actively encouraged proselytizing Islam to non-Muslims. The IPC maintained an office at the Central Prison to provide religious education and information to inmates and reportedly extended its proselytizing efforts to Embassies that shelter foreign workers facing problems. An NGO that receives governmental financial support to obtain the early release of nonviolent offenders also proselytized in the prisons.

Although there was a small community of approximately 150 to 200 acknowledged Christian citizens, a 1980 law prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims. Christian citizens are allowed to transmit their citizenship to their descendents.

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 continued to experience legal and social discrimination. In the family courts (i.e. those controlled by religious bodies), one man's testimony is sometimes given the same weight as that of two women; however, in the civil, criminal, and administrative courts, the testimony of women and men is considered equally.

Inheritance is governed by Islamic law, which differs according to the branch of Islam. In the absence of a direct male heir, Shi'a women may inherit all property, while Sunni women inherit only a portion, with the balance divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased.

During the reporting period, there were no reports of the Government prohibiting state employees from displaying or practicing any elements of their faith.

The law requires jail terms for journalists who defame any religion. Academic freedom is limited in practice by self-censorship. Academics and 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.

In late 2006 the Ministry of Education claimed to have uncovered a large number of secondary school students engaged in devil worship. The Government did not provide details of what, if any, actions it took.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States. There have been cases in which U.S. citizen children have been prevented from returning to the United States; however, there were no reports that such children were forced to convert to Islam, or that forced conversion was the reason the children were not allowed to return to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

There have been past examples of anti-Semitic rhetoric in Government-sponsored education curriculum, such as citing Qur'anic verses to denounce the political intentions of the Jewish persons, specifically in reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

There were incidents of unofficial anti-Semitic commentary from media pundits and some mosque preachers. In the summer of 2006, in the context of the Lebanese-Israeli crisis, a Member of Parliament publicly launched an attack on Jews in which he cited the libelous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Government officials promoted interfaith understanding by meeting with Shi'a, Sunni, and Christian leaders to improve respect for religious freedom. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs expanded the work of its "moderation" initiative. In September 2006 the Ministry opened the World Moderation Center, a body focused on fostering toleration and moderation within Islam as well as showing Islam as a tolerant and moderate faith to the non-Muslim world. The moderation initiative's activities included conferences, lectures, a public relations campaign to spread moderation, mandatory training for Kuwaiti imams, and the publication of monographs devoted to emphasizing Islam's tolerance and moderation.

Interfaith dialogue took place among Christian denominations through the framework of a council representing Christian leaders from various churches and numerous informal meetings.

In the June 2006 elections, an openly declared atheist ran for Parliament on a platform of separating church and state. She was not subject to any restrictions or harassment.

During late 2006 and early 2007, sectarian tensions increased somewhat, in part reflecting regional sectarian violence. A number of officials from the ruling family and the Government publicly called for calm and regularly proclaimed the equality of Sunni and Shi'a citizens.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

In general, citizens were open and tolerant of other religious groups; however, there was a minority of ultraconservatives who oppose the presence of non-Muslim groups in the country and reject the legitimacy of Muslims of other sects than their own.

While some discrimination based on religion reportedly occurred on a personal level, most observers agreed that it was neither systematic nor widespread. There was a perception among some domestic employees and members of the unskilled labor force that there would be better treatment from employers as well as from society as a whole if they converted to Islam. Cases supporting these claims were reported during the reporting period; however, most workers did not feel undue pressure to convert to Islam.

Some church officials reported that domestic workers complained of not being allowed to leave their homes by their employers, thus making it impossible for them to worship with their congregations.

During Ramadan 2006 a Shi'a minister sparked controversy by handing out a book of prayers to Parliament members that contained a remark in the introduction deemed offensive to Sunni Muslims. Some conservatives called for the establishment of a committee to enforce standards of public action based on a specific interpretation of Islam.

During the period covered by this report, there was continued debate over whether it was proper for Muslims to wish non-Muslims well on their holidays. While a small number of conservatives opposed the practice, most found no problem with it, and none of the many Kuwaiti stores that had Christmas-themed displays reported negative incidents.

Pope Benedict XVI's quote of a 14th-century Byzantine emperor who disparaged the Prophet Muhammad triggered controversy and vociferous condemnations in the public sphere, but most Christians reported little or no animosity from Muslims on a personal level. An unknown group printed and circulated a virulently anti-Christian brochure in response to the Pope's remarks.

In December 2006 a parliamentarian criticized a state-run orphanage for accepting Christmas gifts and hanging Christmas greetings during a visit by a U.S. Army delegation. Many Kuwaitis criticized the parliamentarian for his intolerant views.

Many if not most retail stores boycotted Danish products because of controversial cartoons published in a private Danish newspaper in 2005. The boycott had weakened significantly by the end of the reporting period.

Some Shi'a Government employees reportedly had more difficulty in appointments in certain Government agencies; however, two Shi'a ministers were appointed in the February 2006, July 2006, and March 2007 cabinets.

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 matters has long been an Embassy priority. Embassy officials meet frequently with recognized Sunni, Shi'a, and Christian groups, as well as representatives of various unrecognized religious groups and NGOs that deal with religious freedom concerns.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officers actively encouraged the Government to address the concerns of religious leaders, such as overcrowding, lack of adequate worship space, lack of access to religious materials, insufficient staffing, and bureaucratic delays in processing routine requests. During the reporting period, Embassy officials met with senior representatives from the major recognized Christian denominations in the country, encouraged them to present their concerns in a unified manner to the Government, and advocated on their behalf in high-level meetings with Government officials.

In an effort to develop a dialogue with Muslim moderates, the Embassy worked with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to send a ministry official to the United States on a Single-Country International Visitor Leadership Program entitled "Interfaith Dialogue in the United States." The project consisted of a 3-week visit to five representative cities in the United States where the participant met with counterparts of different religious backgrounds. The participant stated that the visit radically transformed his preconceived notions about life in the United States. He reported that he gained an appreciation for the interreligious dialogue in the United States, the freedom of worship that Muslims have in America, and the tolerant diversity he discovered in his interaction with American clergy.

Embassy facilities are used for weekly services by Protestant and Catholic congregations largely composed of official personnel and western expatriates. Official premises are used for these services due to overcrowding and security concerns at compounds located in the downtown area.

LEBANON

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice all religious rites provided that the public order is not disturbed. The Constitution declares equality of rights and duties for all citizens without discrimination or preference but establishes a balance of power among the major religious groups. The Government generally respected these rights; however, there were some restrictions, and the constitutional provision for apportioning political offices according to religious affiliation may be viewed as inherently discriminatory.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. There were, however, periodic reports of tension between religious groups, attributable to competition for political power, and citizens continued to struggle with the legacy of a 15-year civil war that was fought largely along sectarian lines. Despite sectarian tensions caused by the competition for political power, churches, mosques, and other places of worship continued to exist side-by-side, extending a centuries-long national heritage as a place of refuge for those fleeing religious intolerance.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, founded as a modern state in 1943, has an area of 4,035 square miles and a population of 4 million. Because parity among confessional groups remains a sensitive issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932. However, the most recent demographic study conducted by Informational International, a Beirut-based research firm, showed 28 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, 28 percent Shi'a Muslim, 22 percent Maronite Christian, 8 percent Greek Orthodox, 6 percent Druze, and 4 percent Greek Catholic. Over the past 60 years, there has been a steady decline in the number of Christians as compared to Muslims, mostly due to emigration of large numbers of Christian Maronites. There are also very small numbers of Jews, Baha'is, Mormons, Buddhists, and Hindus.

Of the 18 officially recognized religious groups, 4 are Muslim, 12 Christian, 1 Druze, and 1 Jewish. The main branches of Islam are Shi'a and Sunni. The smallest Muslim communities are the Alawites and the Ismaili ("Sevener") Shi'a order. The Maronite community, by far the largest Christian group, has had a centuries-long affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church but has its own patriarch, liturgy, and ecclesiastical customs. The second largest Christian group is the Greek Orthodox Church, principally composed of ethnic Arabs who maintain a Greek-language liturgy. Other Christians are divided among Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians), Armenian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites), Syrian Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldeans, Copts, evangelicals (including Protestant groups such as the Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists), and Latins (Roman Catholic). The Druze, who refer to themselves as al-Muwahhideen, or "believers in one God," are concentrated in the rural, mountainous areas east and south of Beirut. Divisions and rivalries between various groups date back many centuries, and while relationships between religious adherents of different confessions were generally amicable, group identity was highly significant in most aspects of cultural interaction.

Foreign missionaries present in the country operated missions, schools, hospitals, and places of worship.

Many persons fleeing religious mistreatment and discrimination in neighboring states have immigrated to the country, including Kurds, Shi'a, and Chaldeans from Iraq, as well as Coptic Christians from Egypt and Sudan. Precise figures were unavailable due to the lack of census data and the tendency of these groups to assimilate into the culture.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice all religious rites provided that public order is not disturbed. The Constitution requires the state to respect all religions and denominations and guarantee respect for the personal status and religious interests of persons of every religious sect. The Constitution declares equality of rights and duties for all citizens without discrimination or preference but stipulates a balance of power distributed among the major religious groups. The Government generally respected these rights in practice; however, there were some restrictions, and the constitutional provision for apportioning political offices according to religious affiliation may be viewed as inherently discriminatory.

The Government permits recognized religious groups to exercise authority over matters pertaining to personal status, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. The "Twelver" Shi'a, Sunni, Christian, and Druze confessions have state-appointed, Government-subsidized clerical courts that administer family and personal status law.

The Constitution provides that Christians and Muslims be represented equally in Parliament, the Cabinet, and high-level civil service positions, which include the ministry ranks of Secretary General and Director General. It also provides that these posts be distributed proportionally among the recognized religious groups. The constitutional provision for the distribution of political power and positions according to the principle of religious representation is designed to prevent a dominant position being gained by any one confessional group. The "National Pact" of 1943 stipulates that the president, Prime Minister, and speaker of parliament be Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shi'a Muslim, respectively. This distribution of political power functions at both the national and local levels of government.

The 1989 Ta'if Agreement, which ended the country's 15-year civil war, reaffirmed this arrangement but, significantly, mandated increased Muslim representation in Parliament so that it would be equal to that of the Christian community and reduced the power of the Christian Maronite presidency. In addition, the Ta'if Agreement, which concluded the country's 15-year civil war, endorsed the constitutional provision of appointing most senior Government officials according to religious affiliation. This practice is operative in all three branches of Government. The Ta'if Agreement also stipulated a cabinet with power equally allocated between Muslims and Christians. The political establishment has been reluctant to change this "confessional" system, because citizens perceive it as critical to the country's stability.

Formal recognition by the Government is a legal requirement for religious groups to conduct most religious activities. A group that seeks official recognition must submit a statement of its doctrine and moral principles for Government review to ensure that such principles do not contradict popular values or the Constitution. The group must ensure that the number of its adherents is sufficient to maintain its continuity.

Alternatively, religious groups may apply for recognition through recognized 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. Refusal is not reported to occur in practice. Religion is encoded on national identity cards and noted on ikhraaj qaid (official registry) documents, and the Government complies with requests of citizens to change their civil records to reflect their new religious status.

Some religious groups do not enjoy official recognition, such as Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, and unregistered Protestant Christian groups. They are disadvantaged under the law in that their members do not qualify for certain Government positions, but they are permitted to perform their religious rites freely. For example, a Baha'i cannot run for Parliament as a Baha'i candidate because there is no seat allocated for the confession, nor could such an individual hold senior positions in the Government, as these are also allocated on a confessional basis. However, a number of members of unregistered religious groups are recorded under the recognized religions. For example, most Baha'is are registered under the Shi'a sect. As such, a member of the Baha'i community can run for office and fill a seat allocated to the Shi'a sect. Similarly, Mormons are registered under the Greek Orthodox faith. Government decisions on granting official recognition of religious groups do not appear to be arbitrary.

The Government permits the publication in different languages of religious materials of every registered religion.

The Government recognizes the following holy days as national holidays: Armenian Christmas, Eid al-Adha, St. Maroun Day, Islamic New Year, Ashura, Good Friday, Easter (both Western and Eastern rites), the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, All Saints' Day, Feast of the Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas. The Government also excuses Armenian public sector employees from work on St. Vartan Day.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The 1989 Ta'if Agreement called for the eventual elimination of political sectarianism in favor of "expertise and competence;" however, little progress has been made in this regard.

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 property in the country. Protestant evangelical churches are required to register with the Evangelical Synod, a nongovernmental advisory group that represents those churches with the Government. It is self-governing and oversees religious matters for Protestant congregations. Representatives of some churches have complained that the Synod has refused to accept new Protestant groups into its membership since 1975, thereby crippling their clergy's ability to minister to the members of those communities.

Many families have relatives who belong to different religious communities, and intermarriage is not uncommon; however, intermarriage is difficult to arrange in practice between members of some groups. Shari'a, which applies to personal status matters of Muslims, forbids the marriage of a non-Muslim male to a Muslim woman. Druze religious leaders will perform marriages only of Druze couples. There are no procedures for civil marriage; however, the Government recognizes civil marriage ceremonies performed outside the country.

There are no legal barriers to proselytizing; however, traditional attitudes of the clerical establishment strongly discourage such activity. The respective sect's leadership councils make appointments to senior clerical posts. For example, the nomination of Sunni and Shi'a muftis is officially endorsed by the Government's Council of Ministers, and they receive monthly salaries from the Government. The Government appoints and pays the salaries of Muslim and Druze ecclesiastical judges. The leaders of other religious groups, such as Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholics, do not receive salaries from the Government.

The Government does not require citizens' religious affiliations to be indicated on their passports; however, religious affiliation is encoded on national identity cards and noted on ikhraaj qaid documents. The ikhraj qaid, a civil document that indicates personal status information, can be presented by citizens instead of an identity card when they apply for various purposes, such as to obtain Government employment or to enroll in or be employed at a university.

In most cases religious groups administer their own family and personal status laws. Many of these laws discriminate against women. For example, Sunni inheritance law provides a son twice the inheritance of a daughter. Although Muslim men

may divorce easily, Muslim women may do so only with the concurrence of their husbands.

Article 473 of the Penal Code stipulates a maximum prison term of 1 year for anyone convicted of "blaspheming God publicly." There were no prosecutions reported under this law during the reporting period.

Students and teachers found to be working while on tourist visas are deemed to have violated their visa status and are consequently deported. The same sanction applies to religious workers not working under the auspices of a Government-registered religious organization.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Anti-Semitism

The July–August 2006 conflict during which Israeli attacks in Lebanon caused considerable civilian deaths and destruction of infrastructure, as well as Israel's former occupation of the southern part of the country, resulted in a strong antipathy for Israelis. The country's media sometimes referred to Israel as "the Jewish State" to avoid referring explicitly to Israel. During the reporting period, the Shi'a terrorist organization Hizballah through its media outlets regularly directed strong rhetoric against Israel and its Jewish population and characterized many events in the region as part of a "Zionist conspiracy." Moreover, anti-Israeli literature was published and distributed with the cooperation of Hizballah, who also controlled and operated Al-Manar TV. On October 20, 2006, Al-Manar broadcast an interview with the head of the Lebanese Islamic Action Front in which he stated that the resistance and Lebanon were victorious and that defeat was "the lot of Israel and this accursed Israeli people—this accursed nation, the offspring of apes and pigs."

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Following the July–August 2006 conflict with Israel, tensions between the democratically elected Government of Fouad Siniora and the antigovernment opposition led by Hizballah resulted in greater political tension between religious groups. While this political climate contributed to periodic reports of tension and occasional confrontations between religious groups during the reporting period, most of this activity can be attributed to political differences and the legacy of the civil war.

On February 13, 2007, there was a bomb attack on two buses in the town of Ain Alaq, a Christian area north of Beirut. The attack killed 3 persons and injured 20. Leaders of all religious denominations condemned the bombing. It was presumed that the act of violence was intended to provoke sectarian tensions.

On February 5, 2006, in the aftermath of the publication of controversial cartoons in Europe, a crowd of several thousand predominantly Sunni protestors staged a demonstration outside the Danish consulate, situated in the mainly Christian neighborhood of Achrafieh in downtown Beirut. The demonstration turned violent when protestors attempted to burn down the building housing the consulate and also attacked the St. Maroun (Maronite) and St. Nicholas (Greek Orthodox) churches, causing slight material damage. Authorities arrested 441 persons, mostly for damage to the diplomatic facility. These cases were still pending at the end of the reporting period.

A permanent search warrant remained in effect for the 2002 killing of an American citizen missionary affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Evangelical Alliance in Sidon, although the case was officially closed in April 2004. Investigations at the time of the killing suggested that Sunni extremists, possibly operating from the nearby Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp, were responsible.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government actively promotes religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy advances this goal through contacts at all levels of society, public remarks, Embassy public diplomacy programs, and the funding of relevant projects. The Ambassador and Embassy officers met regularly with leaders of religious communities and regularly discussed matters related to religious freedom and tolerance. The Embassy complained to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Information about the airing of anti-Semitic programs by Al-Manar TV. The U.S. Government supports the

principles of the Ta'if Agreement, and Embassy staff regularly discuss the issue of sectarianism with political, religious, and civic leaders.

LIBYA

The country does not have a Constitution, and there is no explicit legal provision for religious freedom. However, a basis for some degree of religious freedom is provided in the Great Green Charter on Human Rights of the Jamahiriya Era, and the Government generally respected the right to freely observe one's religion in practice. The Government tolerates most minority religions but strongly opposes militant forms of Islam, which it views as a threat, and prohibits the proselytizing of Muslims. Religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to actively regulate religious life and at times restricted religious activities seen as having a political dimension or motivation. As in the previous reporting period, de facto Head of State Colonel Muammar Qadhafi made statements during the reporting period denigrating non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Following the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the country on May 31, 2006, the U.S. Government continued to normalize bilateral relations and foster a meaningful and multifaceted relationship including discussion of religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, the head of the Islamic studies faculty at a major national university traveled to the United States on a U.S.-funded International Visitor Program focusing on religious tolerance and interfaith communication.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 703,816 square miles and a population of 5.8 million. Ninety-seven percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Small Christian communities consist almost exclusively of sub-Saharan migrants and miniscule numbers of American and European expatriate workers. A single priest in Tripoli and a bishop resident in Cairo lead the Anglican community. A Greek Orthodox archbishop resident in Tripoli and a priest in Tripoli and Benghazi serve 80 regular Orthodox churchgoers. The Ukrainian Embassy in Tripoli also maintains a small Orthodox church for Tripoli's Russian-speaking population. Two bishops—one in Tripoli, one in Benghazi—lead an estimated 50,000 Roman Catholics. Catholic clergy operate in larger cities, working primarily in hospitals, orphanages, and with the elderly or physically impaired. There are Unitarian churches in Tripoli and Benghazi as well as small Unitarian congregations scattered throughout the country. A Protestant evangelical church in Tripoli serves a population of primarily African migrant workers. While the country historically has no Shi'a community, there were reports that small numbers of Iraqi Shi'a fleeing sectarian tensions in Iraq immigrated during the reporting period. There is no known Jewish community.

Between 100 and 200 Anglicans, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, attend weekly Sunday services in Tripoli. An estimated 80 Orthodox Christians, including members of the Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Russian communities, attend weekly Friday services in Tripoli. Hundreds of African migrant Protestants and hundreds of Catholics also attend services in Tripoli.

Approximately 1.5 to 2 million foreigners reside in the country, mostly from neighboring Arab countries and sub-Saharan Africa, with smaller numbers from South and Southeast Asia. Virtually all non-Sunni Muslims are foreigners. While there was no information on the number of foreign missionaries, the Government criminalizes the proselytizing of Muslims and therefore forbids missionary activity aimed at almost all citizens. Government claims that all citizens are "by definition" Sunni Muslim, coupled with broad prohibitions on any sort of independent political association, prevent citizens from identifying themselves as members of any religious or political group.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the country has neither a Constitution nor any law explicitly providing for religious freedom, the Government generally respected the right to freely observe one's religion in practice. A basis for some degree of religious freedom is provided in the Great Green Charter on Human Rights of the Jamahiriya Era, dated December 6, 1988, which states: "The members of Jamahiriya Society . . . proclaim that religion is absolute faith in the Divinity, and that it is a sacred spiritual value. Religion is personal to each one and common to all. It is a direct relationship with the Creator, without any intermediary. Jamahiriya Society proscribes the monopoly of religion as well as its exploitation for purposes of subversion, fanaticism, sectarianism, partisan spirit, and fratricidal wars."

There is no law expressly guaranteeing an individual's right to choose or change his or her religion or to study, discuss, or promulgate one's religious beliefs. Citizens have no obvious recourse if they believe their rights to religious freedom have been violated. In practice citizens did not have access to courts to seek damages for, or cessation of, a human rights violation.

Islam is the equivalent of a state religion and thoroughly integrated into everyday political and social life. As with all other aspects of individuals' lives, the Government closely monitors and regulates Islam to ensure religious life includes no political dimension. The Government strongly opposes religious extremism or militant Islam, which it views as a threat to the Qadhafi regime. Monitoring of mosques and a widespread culture of self-censorship ensure both clerics and adherents stay within well-established lines of acceptable practice. There is no civil law prohibiting conversion from Islam to another religion. However, the Government prohibits the proselytism of Muslims and actively prosecutes offenders.

During the reporting period, de facto Head of State Colonel Qadhafi made statements denigrating Christians and Jews and urged the practice of Islam. Echoing a statement in April 2006 that all persons are required to be Muslims, Qadhafi noted in a March 31, 2007 speech in Agadez, Niger, that "Christianity is not a faith for people in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas." Speaking during an annual commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, Qadhafi declared that those who do not practice Islam are "losers" and that it was a mistake for Christians to say Jesus was crucified. Following comments in April 2006 that Jews should conform to Islamic practices by making an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Qadhafi stated in a March 27, 2007, interview that "Jews will go extinct because everyone hates them."

The World Islamic Call Society, or WICS, is the official conduit for the state-approved form of Islam. With an emphasis on activities outside the country, it operates a state-run university for moderate Muslim clerics from outside the Arab world. To date WICS has trained 5,000 students in Islamic thought, literature, and history. Upon graduation, the Government encourages students to return home and promote its interpretation of Islamic thought in their own countries. Beyond its role in education, WICS serves as the religious arm of Qadhafi's foreign policy and maintains relations on behalf of the Government with the country's minority religious communities.

The Government limited the number of places of worship allowed for each Christian denomination to one per city. The Government continued to ban the once powerful Sanusiyya Islamic order. The Government routinely granted visas and residence papers to religious staff from other countries.

The country adheres to traditional Islamic law, which states that a non-Muslim woman who marries a Muslim man is not required to convert to Islam, although many do so; however, a non-Muslim man must convert to marry a Muslim woman.

Citizens who wish to perform the Hajj must be at least 40 years old.

The Government recognizes the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, and the birth of the Prophet Muhammad as official holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government maintains an extensive security apparatus that includes police and military units, multiple intelligence services, local revolutionary committees, and people's committees. The resulting pervasive surveillance system monitors and controls may aspects of the lives of individuals, including their religious activities.

While the Government does not single out religious activity for special scrutiny, it actively monitors peaceful religious practice for evidence of political motivations or dimensions. So long as religious groups avoid political activity, they encounter little harassment.

The Government controls all mosques and Islamic institutions, and it may censor clerics. Even mosques endowed by prominent families generally must conform to the

Government-approved interpretation of Islam. The Government also maintains control over religious literature, including Islamic literature.

The Government prohibits meaningful independent association and forbids group activities inconsistent with principles of the 1969 revolution; as a result, the Government authorizes religious associations and lay groups only after confirming that the groups' activities are in line with regime policy. The Government applies these restrictions uniformly to all religious groups.

The Government actively enforces a prohibition on efforts to proselytize Muslims.

Members of minority religious groups, primarily Christians, encountered minimal restrictions conducting worship. However, Christian churches face occasional property disputes and difficulties obtaining municipal services. On February 1, 2007, with the approval of the Catholic community, the Government gave a 19th-century Catholic church in the Tripoli old city to the Anglican community, fulfilling a 1970 promise to provide the Anglican Church with an appropriate worship facility. The Anglican community consecrated the church on March 9, 2007; however, the Church faced difficulties obtaining water service. The Government expelled squatters occupying property belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church; however, the Church continued to face difficulties renovating its property. The Government has not returned Unitarian Church property confiscated in 1971 despite requests from the Church.

On March 7, 2007, the Government announced a ban on women under the age of 40 traveling abroad without a male relative, based on a particular interpretation of Islam. After strong objections, the Government quickly reversed the decision, although there were reports that some female citizens were forbidden from traveling during the reporting period.

The Government allowed priests to visit six Bulgarian medics imprisoned since 1999 for allegedly infecting children with HIV. Criminal courts convicted and sentenced the medics to death in May 2004 and, after appeal and retrial, again in December 2006. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Supreme Court was reviewing the second conviction and death sentence. The medics were allowed to worship with the Greek Orthodox priest in Tripoli.

There were no known places of worship for members of other non-Muslim religions such as Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Buddhism, although adherents are allowed to practice within their homes. Foreign adherents of these religions are allowed to display and sell religious items at bazaars and other gatherings.

Religious instruction in Islam is required in public schools, but in-depth instruction in other religions is not taught. The Government does not issue information on the religious affiliation of children in public schools, and there were no reports of children transferring to private schools for alternative religious instruction.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There continued to be reports of armed clashes between security forces and Islamic groups that oppose the Government and advocate for the establishment of an Islamic Government that would enforce a more conservative form of Islam.

There were 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Government resolved property issues with the Anglican Church of Tripoli pending since 1970. On February 1, 2007, with the concurrence of the Catholic community, the Government formally turned over a former Catholic church in Tripoli's old city to the Anglican Bishop of Tripoli (resident in Cairo) for use by the Anglican community. The Anglican community consecrated the new facility on March 9, 2007.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. While specific information about relations among religious groups in the country is limited, minority religious leaders expressed contentment with the level of religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

On May 31, 2006, the U.S. Government upgraded its diplomatic representation in the country from a liaison office to an Embassy. On June 30, 2006, Secretary of State Rice rescinded the country's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy maintains regular contact with various religious denominations in the country consistent with its efforts to promote human rights and religious freedom. In addition, during the period covered by this report, the head of the Islamic studies faculty at a major national university traveled to the United States on a U.S.-funded International Visitor Program grant focusing on religious tolerance and interfaith communication.

MOROCCO

The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Islam is the official state religion, and the King is "Commander of the faithful and the Supreme Representative of the Muslim community." Non-Muslim foreign communities openly practice their faiths.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. The Government places certain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing. Several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places some restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities were deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, converts from Islam to Christianity may face difficulties.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 172,320 square miles. According to the 2004 census, the population was 33 million, and more than 99 percent of the citizens are Sunni Muslims.

According to Moroccan Jewish community leaders, there are approximately 4,000 Jews, the majority of whom reside in Casablanca and are the remnants of a much larger community that has emigrated. The estimated size of the Rabat Jewish community is 200 to 250. The remainder of the Jewish population is dispersed throughout the country.

The expatriate Christian community, Catholic and Protestant, consists of approximately 5,000 practicing members, although some estimates are as high as 25,000. Most Christians reside in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas.

The Baha'i community, also located in urban areas, numbers 350 to 400 persons. The Government recognizes the presence of a Shi'a Muslim community; however, the size is unknown.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Islam is the official state religion, and the King is "Commander of the faithful and the Supreme Representative of the Muslim community" with the responsibility of ensuring "respect for Islam." The Government prohibits the distribution of Christian religious materials, bans all proselytizing, and tolerates several small religious minorities with varying degrees of restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities are deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature. Jewish and foreign Christian communities openly practice their faiths. A small foreign Hindu community may freely perform cremations and hold services. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of restrictions on the religious activities of the Baha'is or Shi'a Muslims.

No official process exists for registering new religious groups. Registration allows the groups to make financial transactions and undertake other business as private associations and legal entities. Registered churches and associations include the

Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, French Protestant, English Protestant, and Anglican Churches. During the reporting period, the Government did not license or approve new religions or religious organizations.

The Government provides tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the religious activities of the major religious groups, namely Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

The Government's annual education budget funds the teaching of Islam in public schools and religious instruction in separate Jewish public schools. The Government also funded the study of Jewish culture and its artistic, literary, and scientific heritage. At the University of Rabat, two professors teach Hebrew and one teaches comparative religion in the Department of Islamic Studies. Throughout the country, approximately 12 other professors teach Hebrew. The country is the only Arab nation with a Jewish museum.

The Government continued to encourage tolerance, respect, and dialogue among the religious groups. During the reporting period, senior Government officials, including the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, received delegations of U.S. Christian and Jewish leaders.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments continued a graduate level theological course, part of which focuses on Christianity and Judaism, and another that trains both men and women to be counselors and teachers in mosques.

The Government organizes the annual "Fez Festival of Sacred Music," which includes musicians from Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Native American spiritual traditions. The 13th anniversary of the festival was held June 1–10, 2007. During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the King hosted colloquia of Muslim religious scholars that, among other issues, considered ways to encourage tolerance and mutual respect within Islam and between Islam and other religions. For the 4th consecutive year, a woman spoke during Ramadan in the presence of the King and religious scholars. A woman is also a member of the Supreme Council of Ulemas, or religious scholars.

The following Islamic holy days are national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr. Other religious groups observe their holy days without interference from Government authorities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments monitors or provides guidance on Friday mosque sermons and the Qur'anic schools to ensure the teaching of approved doctrine. At times the authorities suppress the activities of Islamists but generally tolerate activities limited to the propagation of Islam, education, and charity. Security forces commonly close mosques to the public shortly after Friday services to prevent use of the premises for unauthorized political activity. The Government strictly controls authorization to construct new mosques. Most mosques are constructed using private funds.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments controls and monitors the activities of mosques, places restrictions on activities deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice or become political in nature, and provides religious training for imams. Authorities stated that these measures have eliminated the exploitation of mosques for political propaganda, such as distributing pamphlets and raising funds for illicit organizations.

The Government does not recognize the Islamic Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), which rejects the King's spiritual authority. The JCO holds to a conservative interpretation of Islam and advocates an Islamic state contrary to the Constitution. The JCO continued to organize and participate in demonstrations and operate two Web sites, although the Government did not allow the public distribution of JCO-published materials. The Government continued closing the JCO's weekly meetings and open houses throughout the reporting period. The Government arrested the Oujda city JCO leader on August 17, 2006. The courts fined the leader $15,000 (150,000 dirhams), determined his house was illegally constructed, and threatened to demolish it. On March 29, 2007, the leader and three other JCO members were sentenced to 1 year in prison for participating in illegal gatherings. JCO sources reported that members were regularly harassed.

Government informers monitored campus activities, primarily those conducted by Islamists.

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." Any attempt to induce a Muslim to convert is illegal. Foreign mis-

sionaries either limit their proselytizing to non-Muslims or conduct their work discreetly. The Government cites the Penal Code's prohibition on proselytism in most cases in which courts ruled to expel foreign missionaries. Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the criminal or civil codes.

Citizens who convert to Christianity and other religions may face social ostracism, and in the past a small number of converts faced short periods of questioning or detention by authorities for proselytizing and have been denied issuance of passports. There were no reports of such occurrences during the reporting period.

On November 28, 2006, a foreign Christian was fined $50 (500 dirhams) and given a 6-month prison sentence for attempting to convert a Muslim to Christianity. The prison sentence was suspended, and the individual left the country of his own accord.

A small foreign Christian community operates churches, orphanages, hospitals, and schools without 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.

The Government permits the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish. It generally confiscates Arabic-language Bibles, however, and refuses licenses for their importation and sale despite the absence of any law banning such books.

There are two sets of laws and courts pertaining to marriage, inheritance, and family matters—one for Muslims and another for Jews. The family law courts are administered, depending on the law that applies, by Muslim and rabbinical authorities who are court officials. Parliament authorizes any changes to these laws. The judges who preside over Islamic family law courts are trained in Shari'a (Islamic law) as applied in the country. From the 2004 institution of a new family law code until the end of 2006, the Ministry of Justice, often in cooperation with international nongovernmental organizations, trained 1,571 judges and 2,303 legal clerks and established 70 family law courts.

Rabbinical authorities administer family courts for Jews. Non-Qur'anic sections of Islamic law concerning personal and family status matters are applicable to all non-Muslim citizens. Christians inherit according to the civil law. Jews maintain their own separate inheritance law based on Jewish religious law.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, converts from Islam to Christianity may face difficulties.

Foreigners attend religious services without any restrictions or fear of reprisals. Many citizens of all religions believe that the country is enriched by its centuries-old Jewish minority, and Jews lived in safety throughout the country during the reporting period. On request the Government provides special protection to community members, visitors, and institutions. Annual Jewish commemorations took place around the country, and Jewish pilgrims regularly visited holy sites. Muslim citizens study at Christian and Jewish schools. A Jewish school in Casablanca has a majority of Muslim students, and a hospital run by the Jewish community provides care to low-income citizens regardless of religion.

Although the free expression of the Islamic faith and free academic and theological discussion of non-Islamic religions are accepted on television and radio, society discourages all public efforts to proselytize. Because many Muslims view the Baha'i Faith as a heretical offshoot of Islam, and consequently, Baha'is as apostates, most members of the Baha'i community avoid disclosing their religious affiliation; however, Baha'is' concerns for their personal safety and property does not prevent their functioning in society, and some hold Government jobs.

There is widespread consensus among Muslims regarding religious practices and interpretation. However, some dissenters challenge the religious authority of the King and call for the establishment of a Government more deeply rooted in their vision of Islam. The Government views these dissenters as a political rather than a religious challenge, as these critiques relate largely to the exercise of power.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government regularly discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials encountered no interference from the Government in making contacts with members of any religious group.

U.S. Government officials met regularly with religious officials, including the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, 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. U.S. programs focusing on religious tolerance and freedom using the U.S. model took place.

U.S. Government officials met regularly with members of religious communities to promote tolerance and freedom. Officials actively promoted and facilitated meetings between the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments and visiting U.S. religious leaders.

WESTERN SAHARA

The Constitution of Morocco provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government of Morocco through the U.S. Mission and the Department of State in Washington as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The territory has an area of 102,706 square miles and a population of 273,000. The majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. Islamic practice in the Western Sahara is frequently characterized by maraboutism, or the veneration of religious figures and their assumed tombs. A very small Catholic minority appears to function openly and without significant problems.

There is a small foreign community working for the U.N. peacekeeping contingent, known by its French initials, MINURSO (the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara); most of its members are not Muslims.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution of Morocco provides for the freedom to practice one's religion. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Restrictions on religious freedom in the territory are the same as those in the Kingdom of Morocco.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

OMAN

The Basic Law, in accordance with tradition, declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of legislation. It also prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for the freedom to practice religious rites as long as doing so does not disrupt public order. The Government generally respected this right, but within defined parameters that placed limitations on the right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. While the Government continued to protect the free practice of religion in general, it formalized previously unwritten prohibitions on religious gatherings in locations other than Government-approved houses of worship, and on non-Islamic institutions issuing publications within their communities, without prior approval from the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA).

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 119,498 square miles and a population of 2.5 million, of whom 1.9 million are citizens. The Government does not keep official statistics on religious affiliation, but most Omanis are either Ibadhi or Sunni Muslims, although there are small communities of ethnically Indian Hindus and Christians that have been naturalized. Ibadhism, a form of Islam distinct from Shi'ism and the "orthodox" schools of Sunnism, historically has been Oman's dominant religious sect, and the Sultan is a member of the Ibadhi community. The Government, however, does not give official preference to any particular religious group.

Non-Ibadhi and non-Sunni religious communities individually constitute less than 5 percent of the population and include various groups of Shiite Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Christians. Christian communities are centered in the major urban areas of Muscat, Sohar, and Salalah and are represented by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and various Protestant congregations. These groups tend to organize along linguistic and ethnic lines. More than 50 different Christian groups, fellowships, and assemblies are active in the Muscat metropolitan area. Shi'a Muslims are a small but well-integrated minority, concentrated in the capital area and along the northern coast. The majority of non-Muslims, however, are noncitizen immigrant workers from South Asia.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is the source of legislation. It also prohibits discrimination against individuals on the basis of religion or religious identity and provides for the freedom to practice religious rites so long as doing so does not disrupt public order. In May 2006 the MERA issued a circular to non-Muslim religious leaders and diplomatic missions, reaffirming the individual's right to practice his or her own religious activities according to his or her values, customs, and traditions; however, the circular informed them that gatherings of a religious nature are not allowed in private homes or any other locations except Government-approved houses of worship. The circular, which formalized existing, but unwritten, Government policy, also prohibits non-Islamic institutions from issuing publications within their communities without prior ministerial approval.

All religious organizations must be registered and licensed by the MERA. The Ministry recognizes the Protestant Church of Oman, the Catholic Diocese of Oman, the al Amana Center (interdenominational Christian), the Hindu Mahajan Association, and the Anwar al-Ghubaira Trading Company in Muscat (Sikh) as the official sponsors for non-Islamic religious communities. Groups seeking licensure must re-

quest meeting and worship space from one of these sponsor organizations, which are responsible for recording the group's doctrinal adherence, the names of its leaders, and the number of active members and submitting this information to the Ministry. Members of non-Islamic communities were free to maintain links with fellow adherents abroad and undertake foreign travel for religious purposes. The Government permitted clergy from abroad to enter the country, under the sponsorship of licensed religious organizations, for the purposes of teaching or leading worship.

Officials at the MERA claim that there is no limit on the number of groups that can be licensed. New religious groups unaffiliated with one of the main communities must gain ministerial approval before receiving a license. While the Government has not published the rules, regulations, or criteria for approval, the Ministry generally considers the group's size, theology or belief system, and availability of other worship opportunities before granting approval. The Ministry employs similar criteria before granting approval for new Muslim groups to form. According to Government regulations, mosques must be built at least 1 kilometer apart and only on Government-owned land.

Religious leaders of all faiths must be licensed with the MERA. The Ministry has a formal licensing process for Muslim imams, and unlicensed lay members are prohibited from leading prayers in mosques. Lay members of non-Islamic communities may lead worship if they are specified as leaders in their group's licensing application. Foreigners on tourist visas are prohibited from preaching, teaching, or leading worship.

Apostasy is not a criminal offense under Omani law. Citizens who convert from Islam to another faith, however, generally face problems under Oman's Personal Status and Family Legal Code, which specifically prohibits a father who leaves the Islamic faith from retaining paternal rights over his children. The law does not prohibit proselytizing, but the MERA will stop individuals or groups from engaging in it if the Ministry receives complaints. The Government uses immigration regulations and laws against harassment to enforce the Ministry's policy. Article 209 of the Penal Code assigns a prison sentence and fine to anyone who publicly blasphemes God or His prophets, commits an affront to religions and faiths by spoken or written word, or breaches the peace of a lawful religious gathering; this could be used to limit religious expression. However, there were no reports of any prosecutions under this statute during the reporting period. The Ministry reviews all imported religious material for approval.

Laws governing family and personal status are adjudicated by Oman's civil courts, according to the Personal Status and Family Legal Code, which is based on the principles of Shari'a. Some aspects of the code discriminate against women, particularly by favoring male heirs in adjudicating inheritance claims. While there was continuing reluctance to take an inheritance dispute to court, for fear of alienating the family, women increasingly were aware of, and took steps to protect and exercise, their rights as citizens. Article 282 of the code exempts non-Muslims from the code's provisions, allowing them to follow their own religious rules pertaining to family or personal status.

Instruction in Islam is mandatory in the basic curriculum in all public school grades K–12. Non-Muslim students are allowed to opt out of the public school system and attend private schools that do not offer instruction in Islam. Non-Muslim members of the military are also exempt from otherwise mandatory Islamic studies. Military bases maintain at least one mosque and one imam for the convenience of military personnel. Training facilities dedicate approximately three sessions per week for the study of Islamic subjects. While non-Muslim members of the military were not prohibited from practicing their own religion, the military did not provide them with alternative places of worship on base.

The Government sponsored fora for examining differing interpretations of Islam, and Government-sponsored interfaith dialogues took place on a regular basis. Private groups that promote interfaith dialogue were permitted to exist, as long as discussions did not constitute an attempt to cause Muslims to recant their Islamic beliefs. During the reporting period, the MERA hosted several Christian and Muslim scholars and lecturers of various schools of thought to discuss interfaith relations and tolerance in Islamic traditions.

The Islamic holy days of Eid al-Adha, Islamic (Hijra) New Year, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Ascension Day, and Eid al-Fitr are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While the Government generally respected the freedom of religion, some Government procedures and policies placed limitations on religious practice.

The prohibition on group worship in private homes or other locations limited the ability of some adherents who were physically distant from those locations or who

lacked reliable transportation to practice their faith collectively. There were reports that Government officials monitored and stopped several small groups from meeting in unsanctioned locations during the reporting period. On the whole, churches and temples voluntarily abided by the May 2006 circular, taking steps to enforce the prohibitions among groups under their sponsorship and provide space on their compounds for worship; however, the lack of sufficient space in the existing locations sanctioned by the Government for collective worship, as well as long waiting lists for use of these facilities, effectively limited the number of groups that could operate.

The MERA approved a limited number of "church visas" to professional clergy of non-Islamic congregations. Some leaders in these congregations claimed, however, that the number of approved clergy was insufficient to handle the demand for worship and therefore limited the natural growth of these congregations

The MERA monitored sermons at mosques to ensure that imams did not discuss political topics. The Government expected all imams to preach sermons within the parameters of standardized texts distributed monthly by the Ministry. While the MERA did not control the content of sermons in non-Islamic communities, groups were prohibited from issuing any publications without obtaining the Ministry's prior approval.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism in the media was present, and anti-Semitic editorial cartoons depicting stereotypical and negative images of Jews along with Jewish symbols, and comparisons of Israeli leaders to Hitler and the Nazis, were published during the reporting period. These expressions occurred primarily in the privately owned daily newspaper, *Al-Watan*, and occurred without Government response.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the MERA met with visiting leaders of some non-Islamic faiths regarding the state of their communities in Oman and discussed the possibility of allowing groups to establish new places of worship in other metropolitan areas. The Ministry provided an additional 10,000 square meters of space to one of the Christian compounds in Muscat to facilitate its expansion, which could help ease space constraints that limit religious practice.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.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 raised its concern about the May 2006 circular prohibiting group worship in private homes with the MERA and encouraged the Government to consider easing restrictions, as well as broadening and strengthening channels of communication with non-Islamic religious communities. Embassy employees of all faiths freely participated in local religious services. Embassy officials also met regularly with representatives of non-Islamic groups to discuss religious freedom concerns.

QATAR

The Constitution, as well as certain laws, provide for freedom of association, public assembly, and worship in accordance with the requirements of public order and morality. However, the law prohibits proselytizing by non-Muslims and places some restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote 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 4,254 square miles and a total population of more than 907,200, of whom one quarter are citizens. Of the citizen population, Shi'a Muslims account for approximately 10 percent and Sunni Muslims 90 percent. The majority of noncitizens are from South and Southeast Asian and Arab countries working on temporary employment contracts, accompanied by family members in some cases. Most noncitizens are Sunni or Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, or Bahá'ís. Most foreign workers and their families live near the major employment centers of Doha, Al Khor, Mesaieed, and Dukhan.

While the Government does not release demographic figures regarding religious affiliation, some membership figures are available from Christian community groups. Accordingly, the Christian community includes Roman Catholics (80,000), Eastern and Greek Orthodox, Anglicans (10,000), Copts (3,000), and other Protestants. The Hindu community is almost exclusively Indian, while Buddhists include South, Southeast, and East Asians. Most Bahá'ís come from Iran. Religion is not a criterion for citizenship, according to the Nationality Law. However, nearly all Qatari citizens are either Sunni or Shi'a Muslims, except for at least one Christian, a few Bahá'ís, and their respective families who were granted citizenship.

No foreign missionary groups operated openly in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, as well as certain laws, provide for freedom of association, public assembly, and worship in accordance with the requirements of public order and morality. However, the law prohibits proselytizing by non-Muslims and places some restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam. While most Qataris are Sunni, Shi'a Muslims freely practice their faith. The nationality law does not impose any restrictions on religious identity.

The Government and ruling family are linked inextricably to Islam. Non-Muslims, however, serve in Government posts. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs controls the construction of mosques, clerical affairs, and Islamic education for adults and new converts. The Amir participates in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods and personally finances the Hajj for citizen and noncitizen pilgrims who cannot afford to travel to Mecca.

Religious groups must register with the Government for legal recognition. The Government has granted legal status to Catholic, Anglican, Greek and other Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, and Indian Christian churches. It maintains an official register of approved religious groups. To be recognized, each group must have at least 1,500 members in the country. While evangelical congregations are not legally recognized because they individually lack the required membership, they worship freely and are provided physical security for their celebrations by the Ministry of Interior when required.

Both Muslims and non-Muslims are tried under the unified court system, incorporating both secular law and Shari'a (Islamic law). Convicted Muslims may earn a sentence reduction of a few months by memorizing the Qur'an. Litigants in civil cases may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction. In 2005 a panel was established in the courts for the Shi'a. The panel decides cases regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other domestic matters. In matters involving religious issues, the new Family Law applies, which is not restricted to one branch of Islam.

Islamic instruction is compulsory for Muslims in state-sponsored schools. While there were no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attended secular private schools. Muslim children were allowed to go to secular and coeducational private schools.

The Government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of all religious books and materials. However, in practice, individuals and religious institutions were not prevented from importing holy books and other religious items for personal or congregational use.

The Islamic holy days of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion, although there were some restrictions.

Converting to another religion from Islam is considered apostasy and is technically a capital offense; however, since the country gained independence in 1971, there has been no recorded execution or other punishment for such an act.

The Government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature. Individuals and religious institutions are allowed to import Bibles and other religious items for personal or congregational use. Christian religious literature, with the exception of Bibles, is readily available in English in local bookstores. In addition, religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter are readily available in local shops. A ship run by a Christian group docked in Doha for 1 week during the reporting period to sell books, including books on Christianity.

Religious services were held without prior authorization from the Government; however, congregations have been asked not to advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses. Christian services are regularly held and open to the public. Some services, particularly those on Easter and Christmas, drew more than 1,000 worshippers.

Christian clergy reported no problems wearing traditional religious clothing in public. While disclosure of religious affiliation is required when applying for a passport or other identity documents, affiliation is not reflected in the issued documents.

Hindus, Buddhists, Bahá'ís, and members of other religious groups do not operate as freely as Christian congregations; however, they did not seek official recognition from the Government during the reporting period. Even so, there was no official effort to harass or hamper adherents of these groups in the private practice of their religion.

According to the Criminal Code, individuals caught proselytizing on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation, for any religion other than Islam, may be sentenced to a prison term of up to 10 years. Proselytizing on behalf of an individual for any religion other than Islam can result in a sentence of up to 5 years. Individuals who possess written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity can be imprisoned for up to 2 years.

While discrimination against expatriates in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services occurred, nationality was usually the determinant rather than religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

On occasion, in response to political events and developments in the region, some of Qatar's privately owned Arabic-language newspapers carried cartoons depicting offensive caricatures of Jews and Jewish symbols, and editorial comparisons of Israeli leaders and Israel to Hitler and the Nazis. These occurred primarily in the Arabic daily newspapers, *Al-Watan, Al-Sharq*, and *Al-Raya*, and drew no Government response.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government enacted the new Family Law on June 29, 2006. The new law is not entirely based on Shari'a, and it is not restricted to one branch of Islam. It contains features consistent with developments worldwide aimed at protecting the rights of women and children and shows compatibility with provisions of relevant international laws. Prior to enactment of the new law, adjudication of family issues was based on articles of the different doctrines of Islam, judges' personal interpretations, and traditions and customs of society. The law applies to all Muslims in Qatar, whether citizens or not. Those of other faiths may choose to have the court apply the rules of their own faith.

The Amir and other top Government officials strongly supported the construction and establishment of churches. The Government assigned a coordinator in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to speed up and facilitate the process, although some restrictions have been imposed on the use of certain religious symbols on buildings.

In May 2005 representatives of Christian churches in the country signed an agreement with the Government for a 50-year lease on land near Doha, where they intend to erect 6 churches. The leases will be nominal. Ground-breaking on the first church began in April 2006. It and three others are expected to be completed in

2008. A board composed of members of all the Christian churches was formed to liaise directly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding church matters. Previous barriers stemming from religious and cultural sensitivities were eased, and church representatives can now approach any Government agency directly to conduct their religious affairs.

The Government granted each church permission to apply for visas for visiting clerics to preside over, and assist in, church services. There were no restrictions on religious ceremonies. Plans for large events were reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which in turn requested the Ministry of Interior to provide appropriate physical security measures.

The Fifth Conference of Inter-Faith Dialogue took place in Doha, May 7–9, 2007. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish representatives were invited. Invitations were extended to the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Coptic, and Orthodox Churches, as well as the Middle East Churches Council, the Vatican, and Jewish rabbis, among others. Rabbis from the United States and other countries participated. During the conference, the Government announced the establishment of the "Doha International Center for Inter-Faith Dialogue," which will be based in the country. The center will be financed by the Government but will function as an independent entity. Its purpose will be to follow up on conference resolutions, papers, and studies, and engage local and international research centers and universities.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote 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 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 foreign Embassies to increase their impact.

The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials also met with representatives of religious communities in the country to discuss religious freedom issues, including protection of the interests of minority congregations. The Embassy brought these concerns to the attention of the National Human Rights Committee and other appropriate officials in the Government.

SAUDI ARABIA

The country is a monarchy with a legal system based on its interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law). Islam is the official religion. There is no legal recognition of, or protection under the law for, freedom of religion, and it is severely restricted in practice. The Government confirmed that as a matter of public policy it guarantees and protects the right to private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious services. However, this right was not always respected in practice and is not defined in law. Moreover, the public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited. While the Government also confirmed its policy to protect the right to possess and use personal religious materials, it did not provide for this right in law.

While overall, Government policies continued to place severe restrictions on religious freedom, there were some improvements in specific areas during the period covered by this report. In addition, there were some positive developments in Government policy that, if fully implemented, could lead to important improvements in the future.

While the majority of citizens support a Government and society based on Islamic law, there are varying views on its interpretation and implementation. Despite this diversity of views, the Government continued to enforce a conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam. Non-Muslims and Muslims who do not adhere to this interpretation faced significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, underrepresentation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of places of worship and community centers. There were also charges of harass-

ment, abuse, and killings at the hands of the mutawwa'in, or religious police, who work for the Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice (CPVPV). In addition, scores of foreign workers and their family members were arrested for practicing their faith and deported. These incidents caused many non-Muslims to worship in fear of, and in such a manner as to avoid discovery by, the police and mutawwa'in. There were also concerns about Saudi textbooks that continued to contain statements of intolerance towards Shi'a, Ismailis, Jews, Christians, and other religious groups, and such statements were also made by public officials, teachers, and Government-paid imams.

Even so, the Government reiterated its policy to halt the dissemination of intolerance, and combat extremism, both within Islam and toward non-Muslim religious groups, within the country and abroad. The Government confirmed that it was reviewing educational materials to remove or revise disparaging references to other religious traditions; it was monitoring sermons at Government-supported mosques and will dismiss or retrain imams whose preaching promotes religious extremism; and it was undertaking to screen out prospective teachers who hold extremist religious views and would dismiss teachers who espouse such views. The Government also announced several policies and initiated various measures intended to curb religious freedom violations committed by the mutawwa'in, and there were fewer reports of harassment by the mutawwa'in than in the past.

During the reporting period, the Government announced several policies and began to undertake various measures that would allow greater freedom for religious minorities. The Government continued progress toward implementation of its announced policy of "balanced development" by promising infrastructure development in predominantly Shi'a and Ismaili areas of the Eastern Province and Najran Province, respectively. The Government appointed more Shi'a judges to the Ja'afari courts in the Eastern Province and one Shi'a and one Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a to the board of the Government's Human Rights Commission (HRC). There were fewer reports of confiscation of religious materials at the airports in Jeddah and Dhahran, and fewer mutawwa'in raids of religious gatherings in the Western Hijaz region and in the Eastern Province. In addition, there were reports of larger public and private celebrations of Shi'a holidays within the Eastern Province.

In response to growing concerns about the mutawwa'in, the Government allowed for unprecedented media coverage and criticism of the mutawwa'in. In addition, the Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council) voted against expanding the jurisdiction of the mutawwa'in and voted for additional training for them.

Senior U.S. officials discussed a number of key policies concerning religious practice and tolerance with the Government, as well as specific cases involving the infringement of the right of religious freedom. The U.S.-Saudi Strategic Dialogue continued with other meetings of its working groups, notably the Partnership, Education, Exchange, and Human Development Working Group. The dialogue raised the profile of key issues, including the promotion of religious freedom and tolerance.

In November 2006 Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice redesignated Saudi Arabia as a Country of Particular Concern, and the Government was issued a waiver of sanctions "to further the purposes of the Act."

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,225,000 square miles and a population of more than 27 million, including an estimated foreign population of more than 8 million. The foreign population reportedly includes 1.5 million Indians, 1.5 million Bangladeshis, 1.2 million Filipinos, 1 million Pakistanis, 1 million Egyptians, 600,000 Indonesians, 400,000 Sri Lankans, 350,000 Nepalese, 250,000 Palestinians, 150,000 Lebanese, 100,000 Eritreans, and 30,000 Americans.

The majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims who predominantly subscribe to the Government-sanctioned interpretation of Islam. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Call, and Guidance (MOIA) is responsible for 72,000 Sunni mosques and employs 120,000 persons, including 72,000 imams. The grand muftis of the two holiest mosques in Mecca and Medina report directly to the King.

Comprehensive statistics for the religious denominations of foreigners are not available; however, they include Muslims from the various branches and schools of Islam, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others. The Shi'a Muslim minority of reportedly two million persons lives mostly in the Eastern Province, although a significant number also reside in Mecca and Medina in the Western Hijaz region. There are also 700,000 Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a, a minority group found primarily in the Najran Province.

In addition to European and North American Christians, there are Christian East Africans, Indians, Pakistanis, Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians residing in the

country, including as many as one million Roman Catholics. Ninety percent of the Filipino community is Christian. It is reported that there are private Christian religious gatherings throughout the country. There is no information on the number of atheists in the country.

In January 2007 the country hosted more than two million Muslim pilgrims from around the world and from all branches of Islam for the annual Hajj to Mecca.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

According to the country's Basic Law, the Qur'an and the Sunna (traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) constitute the country's Constitution, and Islam is the official religion. It is the Government's policy that non-Muslims are permitted to practice their religion freely within their homes without interference. However, under the Government's interpretation of Islam, there is no legal recognition or protection of religious freedom, which is severely restricted in practice.

As custodian of Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, the Government considers its legitimacy to rest largely on its interpretation and enforcement of Islam, which is based on the writings and teachings of 18th-century Sunni religious scholar Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. The country's Basic Law establishes the system of Government, rights of citizens and residents, and powers and duties of the Government. Neither the Government, nor society in general, accepts the concept of separation of religion and state in terms of governance.

Non-Muslims and Muslims whose beliefs do not adhere to the Government-approved interpretation of Islam must practice their religion in private and are vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, detention, and if a non-citizen, deportation. Although no law requires citizens or passport holders to be Muslim, almost all citizens are Muslims. Proselytizing by non-Muslims is illegal, and conversion by Muslims to another religion (apostasy) carries the death penalty, although there have been no reported executions for apostasy in years.

The judicial system is based on Shari'a, the traditional system of interpreting laws derived from the Qur'an, the Sunna, and other religious sources. The Government recognizes all four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence and the Shi'a Ja'afari school of jurisprudence. However, while Government universities provide training on the other Sunni schools, they focus on the Hanbali school. Consequently, most judges adhere to the Hanbali school, which is considered the most conservative of the Sunni schools.

The Council of Senior Ulema (religious scholars) is an advisory body of reportedly 21 Sunni religious jurists, including the Minister of Justice, which reports to the King. The Ulema meet periodically to interpret Shari'a and establish the legal principles that guide lower court judges. There were no Shi'a Ulema members during the period covered by this report.

The Government permits Shi'a judges to use their own version of Shari'a to adjudicate cases limited to family law, inheritance, and endowment management. However, there were only seven Shi'a judges, all of whom were located in the Eastern Province. Three of these seven judges served on a Court of Appeals. Unlike the Shi'a in the Eastern Province, Shi'a living in other parts of the country, including the western Hijaz region and central Riyadh region, did not have access to local, regional, or national Shi'a Courts of Appeals. Instead, they had to appeal their cases to Sunni courts. The Sunni Shari'a courts could, and did, overrule judgments of Shi'a judges, and other Government departments could choose not to implement judgments rendered by Shi'a judges. The Government also replaced unexpectedly at least one Shi'a judge during the reporting period.

In accordance with the country's official interpretation of Islam, it is considered acceptable to discriminate against religions held to be polytheistic. Christians and Jews, who are classified as "People of the Book," are also discriminated against, but to a lesser extent. This discrimination is manifested, for example, in calculating accidental death or injury compensation. For example, according to the country's interpretation of Shari'a, in the event a court renders a judgment in favor of a plaintiff who is a Jewish or Christian male, the plaintiff is only entitled to receive 50 percent of the compensation a Muslim male would receive, and all others (including Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs) are only entitled to receive 1/16 the amount a male Muslim would receive. Furthermore, judges may discount the testimony of nonpracticing Muslims or individuals who do not adhere to the official interpretation of Islam. For example, testimony by Shi'a can be ignored in courts of law or is deemed to have less weight than testimony by Sunnis, despite official Government statements that judges do not discriminate based on religion when hearing testimonies. Moreover,

a woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man's, and a non-Muslim's testimony is worth less than that of a Muslim's.

The CPVPV is a semiautonomous agency with the authority to monitor social behavior and enforce morality consistent with the Government's interpretation of Islam primarily, but not exclusively, within the public realm. The CPVPV reports to the King through the Royal Diwan, or royal court. The Ministry of Interior coordinates with, but does not have authority over, the CPVPV or the mutawwa'in. The CPVPV is one of eight Government entities with the authority under the Criminal Code to arrest and detain persons. However, the mutawwa'in are not allowed to engage in surveillance, detain individuals for more than 24 hours, arrest individuals without police accompaniment, or administer any kind of punishment. Nevertheless, the Government was investigating several incidents that occurred during the reporting period where the mutawwa'in were accused of violating these restrictions. Mutawwa'in enforcement of social standards of appearance and behavior included insisting upon compliance with conservative dress standards, forced observance of the five daily calls to prayer, disrupting the production and consumption of alcohol and narcotics, and dispersing some public religious gatherings.

According to an official report issued by the CPVPV in January 2007, there were 3,227 mutawwa'in working in 1,310 centers in all 13 provinces. The report also indicated that during the Muslim calendar year that crosses 2005–06, there were 390,117 incidents involving 402,725 persons, of whom only 101,143 were citizens. The mutawwa'in referred only 6.4 percent of these incidents to the "relevant authorities," supposedly to protect the privacy of those involved. There were also reports that few cases were referred to the police, so as to reduce the burden on the overstretched police force.

The MOIA supervises and finances the construction and maintenance of most Sunni mosques, although approximately 30 percent of Sunni mosques are built and endowed by private persons, either as acts of charity or at private residences. The MOIA does not register or support Shi'a mosques.

The majority of Sunni imams are full-time MOIA employees, receiving on average between $533 and $800 (SAR 2,000–3,000) per month, which is considered low, compared to other full-time Saudi civil servants. Shi'a imams are not funded by the MOIA and instead rely on community contributions, which can vary widely depending on the size of the mosque. Like many Saudis, imams tend to have separate businesses to supplement their salaries. An MOIA committee defines the qualifications of Sunni imams, while the Ministry of Interior is responsible for investigating complaints against imams for promoting intolerance, violence, or hate. The Government's policy is to counsel imams who issue intolerant fatwas or who make religious statements that promote intolerance, violence, or hatred, especially of non-Sunnis.

The Government's stated policy is to permit private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious practice, and to address violations of this policy by Government officials. However, the mutawwa'in sometimes did not respect this policy. Individuals whose ability to worship privately had been infringed could address their grievances through the Ministry of the Interior, the HRC, the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR—a quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organization (NGO)), and when appropriate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The HRC reported that it received and acted on complaints against the mutawwa'in. Otherwise, during the reporting period, there was no information available on the number of complaints filed or the Government's response to these complaints.

The Government-stated policy is that religious materials for personal private use are allowed in the country, and customs officials and the mutawwa'in do not have the authority to confiscate personal private religious materials. The mutawwa'in did not always respect this policy, though, and there were signs in the airports warning visitors to declare all religious paraphernalia to the customs officials. It is also the Government's policy to inform foreign workers at its missions abroad that they have the right to worship privately and possess personal religious materials, and to provide the name of the appropriate offices where grievances could be filed. However, during the reporting period there was no evidence the Government carried out this policy, either orally or in writing, and there were no reports of any grievances filed by such workers.

The HRC was created to address human rights abuses and promote human rights within the country. The 24-member HRC board, which does not include women, was established in December 2006. Two HRC board members appointed during this reporting period were Shi'a and Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a, respectively. The HRC reported that it received more than 8,000 human rights complaints, including infractions by mutawwa'in. The HRC was also given the mandate to improve human rights awareness in the country, including the promotion of tolerance. In this endeavor, the HRC was working with the Ministry of Education and providing mate-

rials and training to the police, security forces, and mutawwa'in on protecting human rights. The HRC reportedly advised the CPVPV leadership in May 2007 not to interfere with non-Saudi nationals' private religious activities. The King also issued a decree that ministries had 3 weeks to respond to complaints filed by the HRC.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for primary and secondary public education, while the Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for tertiary public education. Both ministries also monitor private education. In 2006 the Government formed the High Commission for Education (HCE) to oversee the ongoing reform of the primary and secondary educational system. The HCE reports to the King and is chaired by the Crown Prince. Its members include the Ministers of Justice, Islamic Affairs, Education, Higher Education, and Labor; two members of the Shura Council; the Secretary General of the Islamic League; and a representative of the Council of Senior Ulema. The HCE's mandate is to oversee the effort to improve textbooks (including the removal of intolerant language), educational curricula (including the promotion of human rights), and teacher training.

In addition to the secular National Day on September 23, the Islamic religious feasts of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are recognized as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Public religious practice is generally limited to that which conforms to the teachings of the 18th-century Sunni religious scholar Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. Practices contrary to this interpretation, such as the celebration of Maulid al-Nabi (Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) and visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims, are forbidden, although in some places enforcement was more relaxed than in others. Similarly, the Government also prohibits the public propagation of Islamic teachings that differ from the officially accepted interpretation of Islam.

Regardless of their personal religious traditions, public school students at all levels receive mandatory religious instruction based on the Government's interpretation of Sunni Islam. Non-Muslim students in private schools are not required to study Islam. However, private religious schools are not permitted for non-Muslims or for Muslims adhering to unofficial interpretations of Islam.

In higher education the Government discriminated against Shi'a in the selection process for students, professors, and administrators at public universities. For example, it was estimated that Shi'a comprise 2 percent of professors at a leading university in Al-Ahsa, an area that is at least 50 percent Shi'a. Also in Al-Ahsa, it was estimated that there were five Shi'a principals at the several hundred boys' schools and no Shi'a principals at the several hundred girls' schools. Although Shi'a principals were also underrepresented in Qatif, it was reported during the reporting period that the Government started appointing Shi'a principals at girls' schools. In addition, Shi'a teachers are not permitted to teach certain courses in schools, such as history or religion, even in predominantly Shi'a areas.

In addition to discrimination in education, members of the Shi'a minority were also subjected to political discrimination tacitly approved by the Government. For example, although Shi'a comprise 10 to 15 percent of the citizen population and approximately half of the citizens in the Eastern Province, Shi'a were underrepresented in senior Government positions. There were no Shi'a governors, mayors, or ministry branch directors in the Eastern Province, and only 3 of the 59 Government-appointed municipal council members were Shi'a. However, the Shi'a are well-represented among the elected members of the municipal councils. The municipal council at Qatif was headed by an elected Shi'a. At the national level, there were only 4 Shi'a in the 150-member Majlis Al-Shura.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Shi'a also faced considerable employment discrimination in other parts of the public as well as in the private sector. While some Shi'a occupied high-level positions in Government-owned companies and Government agencies, many Shi'a believed that openly identifying themselves as Shi'a would have a negative impact on career advancement. While there was no formal policy concerning the hiring and promotion of Shi'a, anecdotal evidence suggested that in some companies, including in the oil and petrochemical industries, well-qualified Shi'a were passed over for less-qualified Sunni compatriots. In the public sector, Shi'a were significantly underrepresented in national security related positions.

Many Shi'a were subjected to systemic religious discrimination, too. For example, the Government does not finance construction or maintenance of Shi'a mosques. Shi'a who wished to build a new mosque were required to obtain the permission of the MOIA, the municipality, and the governorate, which is functionally part of the Ministry of Interior; the latter office's approval was not necessary for Sunni mosques. While the Government approved construction of new Shi'a mosques in

Qatif and some areas of Al-Ahsa, sometimes after lengthy delays, it did not approve construction of Shi'a mosques in Dammam, home to a significant number of Shi'a.

Furthermore, the Government does not officially recognize several hawzat (centers of Shi'a religious instruction) located in the Eastern Province, provide financial support to them, recognize certificates of educational attainment for their graduates, or provide their graduates employment, all of which it does for Sunni religious training institutions. Religious training for all other religious groups is prohibited.

The Government refused to approve construction or registration of husseiniyat, which serve as Shi'a community centers. Shi'a were forced to build areas in private homes to serve as husseiniyat, which did not enjoy legal recognition. These husseiniyat sometimes did not meet safety codes, and the lack of legal recognition made their long-term financing and continuity considerably more difficult.

While the authorities allowed Shi'a in the Eastern province city of Qatif greater freedom in their religious practices, in other areas with large Shi'a populations, such as Al-Ahsa and Dammam, the authorities continued to restrict Shi'a religious practices. The Government imposed restrictions on public observances of Ashura (commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussayn ibn Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad) in Al-Ahsa, Dammam, and other mixed areas where Shi'a and Sunni live, banning public marches, loudspeaker broadcast of clerics' lectures from husseiniyat, and, in some instances, gatherings within husseiniyat. In addition, the Government continued to exclude Shi'a perspectives from the state's extensive religious media and broadcast programming and appeared to enforce more sporadic restrictions such as banning the importation and sale of Shi'a books and audio and video products.

Since the Government-approved interpretation of Islam holds that the veneration of humans, including the Prophet Muhammad, is idolatrous, public and sometimes private celebrations of Maulid al-Nabi were forbidden. For example, on April 16, 2007, two Shi'a men in Al-Ahsa were arrested for planning a large private Maulid al-Nabi celebration. However, many Sunnis, Shi'a, and Sufis celebrated the Prophet's birthday publicly without Government interference.

The Government officially did not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country to conduct religious services, although some did so under other auspices, and the Government generally allowed their performance of discreet religious functions. Such restrictions made it difficult for most non-Muslims to maintain contact with clergy, particularly Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians who require a priest on a regular basis to receive the sacraments required by their faiths. However, many non-Muslims continued to gather for private worship

The Government required non-citizens to carry iqamas, or legal resident identity cards, which contained a religious designation for "Muslim" or "non-Muslim." There were unconfirmed reports that some mutawwa'in pressured sponsors and employers not to renew iqamas of non-Muslims they had sponsored for employment if it was discovered or suspected that those individuals had either led, sponsored, or participated in private non-Muslim worship services. Similarly, there were reports that mutawwa'in pressured employers and sponsors to reach verbal agreements with non-Muslim employees that they would not participate in private or public non-Muslim worship services.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to commit abuses of religious freedom; however, many reported abuses were difficult or impossible to corroborate. Fear, and the resulting secrecy surrounding any non-Sunni religious activity, contributed to reluctance to disclose any information that might harm persons under Government investigation. Moreover, information regarding Government practices was generally incomplete because judicial proceedings usually were closed to the public, despite provisions in the 2002 Criminal Procedural Law that requires court proceedings to be open.

While the Government prohibited public non-Muslim religious activities, the Government's stated policy is that people are free to practice their faith in the privacy of their own homes. However, inconsistent enforcement of this policy caused many non-Sunnis to worship in fear of harassment, intimidation, or detention at the hands of the police or mutawwa'in.

While mutawwa'in have the authority to confront individuals violating social standards of dress and behavior, the Government also requires them to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner. However, the mutawwa'in often failed to comply with these requirements, and there was no evidence that the Government took any action against mutawwa'in who violated these regulations, except in a few cases, all but one of which resulted in the deaths of citizens.

For example, a number of people were detained for nonpublic, non-Muslim worship. Others were abused while in mutawwa'in custody. Some were likely surveilled

both prior to their arrest and subsequent to their release. In yet other cases, the mutawwa'in failed to comply with the requirement that they have a police escort during investigations and arrests. There were several incidents where mutawwa'in entered private homes and confiscated personal religious materials, which were not returned to the owners, although such items are supposedly not considered contraband. The fear of surveillance and targeting of leaders and organizers of non-Sunni religious groups, the fear of arbitrary detention for religious reasons, and the fear of abuse while in mutawwa'in custody deterred some non-Sunnis from gathering in any significant numbers to hold private worship services.

There were also numerous reports of mutawwa'in harassing, improperly arresting, abusing, and detaining for longer than 24 hours both citizens and foreigners. These reports were most prevalent in the central Nejd region, which includes the capital, Riyadh.

Women, and especially foreign women, were frequently harassed by the mutawwa'in for failure to observe strict dress codes, particularly failure to wear headscarves. Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior included closing commercial establishments during the five daily prayer observances and detaining men and women found together who were not related. In the past, the press reported that mutawwa'in warned shopkeepers not to sell New Year's or Christmas gifts or decorations. The warning also reminded employees not to allow their staff to celebrate either holiday openly. There were reports during the reporting period that CPVPV leadership had instructed its members to confiscate any materials associated with Valentine's Day, although non-Muslims celebrating this holiday privately would not be targeted.

Although there was an increasing degree of public discussion of conservative religious traditions and their enforcement during the reporting period, including in the press, discussion of many sensitive religious issues, including sectarian differences, remained limited, and criticism of Islam was forbidden. Writers and other individuals who publicly criticized the official interpretation of Islam, including those who favored a more moderate interpretation than the Government's, risked mutawwa'in harassment, intimidation, detention, and if a foreigner, deportation. Several journalists who wrote critically about the religious leadership or who questioned theological dogma were banned from writing or traveling abroad.

There were reports during the reporting period that some Shi'a experienced discrimination within the primary and secondary school systems. Some religious education teachers told their students that Shi'a practices were un-Islamic and that Shi'a students must follow Sunni traditions to be true Muslims. Some teachers allegedly told their students that Shi'a were not Muslims, but rather kufaar (unbelievers) or rafidah (rejectionists).

During the reporting period, some textbooks containing prejudicial religious statements were revised somewhat to remove content disparaging of religious groups other than Islam. However, many books reportedly retained language that was intolerant of Jewish, Christian, and Shi'a religious beliefs and espoused hatred of other religious traditions, especially Christianity and Judaism. There were also reports in Al-Ahsa and Qatif of prejudicial questions on exams and reports that some teachers continued to use anti-Shi'a rhetoric, such as calling Shi'a students infidels or polytheists.

The Government blocked access to some Internet Web sites with religious material that the Government considered offensive or sensitive. The Government continued to block the Shi'a Web site *rasid.com*.

Shi'a mosques in mixed neighborhoods were required to recite the Sunni call to prayer, which is distinct from their own, during prayer times. In addition, although Shi'a combine two of the daily five Sunni prayers, Shi'a businessmen were often forced to close their shops during all five prayer times, in accordance with Sunni practices.

The Government also arrested and detained a Shi'a cleric in Al-Ahsa for 1 week in January 2007 for operating a hussainiya without a license.

There were also reports that the Government discriminated against Sulaimani Ismailis by prohibiting them from having their own religious books, allowing religious leaders to declare them unbelievers, denying them Government employment, restricting them to lower-level jobs, and relocating them from the southwest to other parts of the country or encouraging them to emigrate.

During the reporting period, there continued to be instances in which Sunni imams, who are paid Government stipends, used anti-Jewish, anti-Christian, and anti-Shi'a language in their sermons. Although this language declined in frequency after the Government began encouraging moderation following the 2003 terror attacks, there continued to be instances in which mosque speakers prayed for the death of Jews and Christians, including from the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the

Prophet's Mosque in Medina. The HRC complained to the Government about such sermons, and reportedly some offending imams were disciplined. There were unconfirmed reports that MOIA had dismissed some imams but allowed other imams to continue to espouse intolerant ideas.

On June 23, 2007, Senior Council of Ulema member Sheikh Saleh Al-Fawzan issued a fatwa that seemed to define "liberals" as non-Muslims, which many viewed as grounds for violence against liberals. On June 26, 2007, although he did not retract the fatwa, he clarified his statement as nonviolent.

On June 1, 2007, Ahmad Al-Bulawi, a 50-year-old retired border patrol guard, died at a CPVPV center in the northern town of Tabuk, allegedly of a heart attack. Al-Bulawi's family demanded an autopsy to determine the cause of his death. The mutawwa'in arrested Al-Bulawi and brought him to their center because he had a Saudi woman who was not his relative in his car. Both Al-Bulawi's family and the family of the woman in the car stated that he was working as a driver for the woman and her family. At the end of the reporting period, three mutawwa'in and a policeman were scheduled to go to trial in August 2007 for their alleged involvement in Al-Bulawi's death.

On May 23, 2007, 28-year-old Suleiman Al-Huraisi fell unconscious in a CPVPV office and never recovered. According to his father and brother, who were arrested with him for suspicion of alcohol production, at least 18 mutawwa'in raided their home in Riyadh. Some mutawwa'in allegedly beat Al-Huraisi in his home and at their office. At the end of the reporting period, officials stated that one member of the mutawwa'in would be tried at an unspecified date for assaulting Al-Huraisi.

In May 2007 the U.S. consulate general in Jeddah received a report that a Saudi citizen was arrested, later released, and then rearrested because he had converted from Islam to Christianity. He also claimed that security forces had tortured him. The consulate general received information that he was scheduled for a trial, but no further information was available at the end of the reporting period.

In May 2007 an Asian maid was severely injured after jumping out of her fourth-story apartment in Jeddah during a mutawwa'in raid.

In March 2007 there were media reports that the CPVPV interfered with that month's Riyadh Book Fair; the Ministry of Culture and Information denied these reports.

In February 2007 newspapers reported that the CPVPV stated its members had instructions to confiscate gifts associated with the "pagan feast" of Valentine's Day and punish those who market them in the Kingdom. The mutawwa'in noted they would not "assault non-Muslims" celebrating this "feast" if celebrated in their homes and warned Muslims about participating in any such celebrations.

On December 29, 2006, the mutawwa'in raided a private gathering of the Ahmadiyya religious group. Reportedly, the mutawwa'in detained 49 members, including at least 19 women and children (including a 6-month-old infant), and 14 youths. There were 25 Indians, 23 Pakistanis, and 1 Syrian. Nine other Ahmadiyya foreign workers were arrested in early January 2007. All of these individuals and their families were deported to their countries of origin. The Government claimed the group consisted of up to 150 persons and implied that the Government was concerned about the size of the gathering. In February 2007 two more Ahmadiyya guest workers were arrested in Riyadh and deported. The Government did not provide an explanation for their arrests or for the earlier deportations. There was no indication that the Ahmadiyya foreign workers, some of whom lived in the country for as long as 25 years, were guilty of breaking any laws.

On October 30, 2006, Al Hayat reported that the mutawwa'in chased a car containing a girl and her boyfriend, which led to an accident and the girl's death. The paper demanded that CPVPV Director General Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Sheikh hold those responsible accountable. However, after the accident no official news was published that indicated any official investigation or action.

On October 15, 2006, the mutawwa'in raided a hall in Tabuk where a Filipino priest was preaching. The mutawwa'in confiscated Bibles and detained the priest, who was turned over to the "concerned authorities" to complete the investigation. He was released a week later.

In October 2006 police arrested a Filipino Christian man in Jeddah and falsely charged him with drug possession. The police later dropped those charges and then formally charged him with proselytizing. He was detained for 8 months, received 60 lashes, and deported in May 2007.

In 2006 there were also reports of several raids on Filipino Christian services in Riyadh. Mutawwa'in raided services and confiscated religious materials such as Bibles and Christian symbols but typically did not detain non-Muslims.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), during August and September 2006, a Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a, Hadi Al-Mutif, conducted a hunger strike to protest his

continued imprisonment for "insulting the Prophet Muhammad." In his first trial, Al-Mutif was sentenced to death. Reportedly the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, and Al-Mutif has served at least 12 years. According to NGOs, Al-Mutif twice attempted suicide, and as a response to his suicide attempts, the Government has kept him in isolation since January 2007. At the end of the reporting period, Al-Mutif remained in prison because he had been sentenced under haad (a punishment mandated by the Qur'an) and not under ta'azir (a punishment not mandated by the Qur'an). The HRC took his case, and the Supreme Judicial Council was reviewing it. If the case is changed to ta'azir, then the King may pardon him.

In September 2006 300 Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a in Najran reportedly protested their "repression" and demanded the release of Ismailis held in jail since 2000 and an apology from a cleric and judge who labeled them "infidels." They also demanded the cessation of attempts by local authorities to settle Yemeni tribesmen given citizenship on land owned by Ismailis.

On June 9, 2006, the police arrested four church leaders at a private Christian worship service in Jeddah, two Ethiopians and two Eritreans. They were deported in July 2006.

In March 2006 Ala' Amin Al-Sadeh claimed a Sunni judge refused his testimony because he is Shi'a. At the recommendation of the Dammam branch of the NSHR, Al-Sadeh filed a complaint with the Ministry of Justice and the NSHR. There was no additional information from the NSHR or the Ministry of Justice about this case during the reporting period.

In April 2006, the Government arrested an Indian Roman Catholic priest. He was released and left the country.

Also in April 2006, the mutawwa'in arrested a female Shi'a student in Riyadh, allegedly for proselytizing other students. She was released several days later.

In April 2005, 20 Pakistani Christians were arrested and later released. That same month, five East African Christians were also arrested and released 1 month later.

In March 2005, mutawwa'in destroyed a makeshift Hindu shrine in Riyadh and three worshippers were deported.

In March 2005 mutawwa'in arrested Indian Christian Samkutty Varghese, who was released in July 2005 and deported. Eight others were arrested, and six were deported. Further details on the status of the two who remained were not known.

In February 2005 mutawwa'in raided a Filipino Christian worship service in Riyadh; those detained and arrested were released within hours of the raid. There was no further information about the status of these individuals.

In September 2004 seven Filipino Christian leaders were arrested and detained by the mutawwa'in. All were released within 1 month, and six were deported in July 2005. There were no reports on the status of the one not deported.

In 2003 a woman filed the first lawsuit against the CPVPV. She alleged that mutawwa'in recklessly drove her car into an electrical post and left her and her daughter, both in the backseat, at the scene of the accident. The hearing for the woman's third appeal is scheduled for September 2007.

At least 17 Sulaimani Ismailis Shi'a who were jailed after riots in the Najran Province in the year 2000 remain imprisoned. The Government asserted the men were arrested and imprisoned for disturbing public order and threatening the safety of the Najran governor, not for religious reasons.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to return to the United States. Under the law, children of male citizens are considered Muslim, regardless of the country or the religious tradition in which they have been raised. While the Government's application of this law discriminates against non-Muslim, noncitizen mothers and denies their children the freedom to choose their religion, in practice some children of mixed marriages were raised in other religions. There were reports of non-Muslims who faced considerable pressure by work colleagues to convert to Islam.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitic comments were often conflated with anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist rhetoric. According to the Anti-Defamation League, there was anti-Semitism in the media, characterized by stereotypical images of Jews along with Jewish symbols, and comparisons of Israeli Government actions to those of the Nazis.

Anti-Semitic editorial comments appeared in the print and electronic media. For example, on January 13, 2007, an anti-Semitic cartoon in the *Al-Yawm* newspaper

depicted Jews as thieves, calling them "God's Cheater People," a pun in Arabic on the expression "God's Chosen People."

In addition, *Al-Arabiya*, an Arab news satellite TV channel founded by late King Fahd's brother-in-law, was referred to disparagingly by religious conservatives as "Al-Ebreya" (The Hebrew Channel) for perceived biases against Islamic interests.

At times there was also media speculation on whether Christians and Jews should be considered "people of the book" and thus due the respect required by Islam.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Government made clear in the context of various discussions its policy, efforts, and new proposals to allow people to practice their faith in the privacy of their homes and to improve the climate of tolerance towards other religious groups and within Islam. Some of these positive developments started to yield improvements in the status of religious freedom.

During the reporting period, the Government issued a decree that all members of the mutawwa'in must wear official photo identification badges so members of the public can tell them apart from religious vigilantes.

In June 2007 the Majlis Al-Shura voted to provide radio equipment to the mutawwa'in so they can call the police during an emergency and possibly prevent the mutawwa'in from overstepping their authority. In addition, the Majlis Al-Shura voted against expanding the jurisdiction of the mutawwa'in and voted for additional training for them.

The NSHR reported that at the end of 2006, the CPVPV established a training institute at Umm Al-Qura University in Mecca, where it will send a limited number of mutawwa'in for graduate studies. Part of the curriculum will focus on improving the behavior of the mutawwa'in. In addition, on their own initiative and funds, individual mutawwa'in members can pursue continuing education, including training on how to work more effectively with the public. Government officials also stated that the mutawwa'in are being counseled, trained, more closely monitored, and evaluated, and the CPVPV president reportedly told mutawwa'in members they are no longer allowed to confiscate personal belongings.

There were notably fewer reports of mutawwa'in raids of religious gatherings in the Western Hijaz region and in the Eastern Province. Moreover, unlike in previous years, there were no known cases during the reporting period of Muslims or non-Muslims wearing religious symbols in public confronted by the mutawwa'in for engaging in idolatry.

In response to growing concerns about the mutawwa'in, the Government allowed unprecedented media coverage of the trials of the mutawwa'in allegedly involved in the harassment and deaths of citizens and much greater freedom to criticize openly the religious establishment, including in the press, such that many writers denounced abuses committed by the mutawwa'in, and some called for a nation-wide examination of the CPVPV's role or even its disbandment. Whereas in the past such criticism often resulted in harassment by the mutawwa'in and generated death threats from religious extremists, there were no similar reports during the reporting period.

According to HRW and media reports, on October 31, 2006, the King pardoned 10 more of the at least 57 Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a who were imprisoned after riots in the Najran Province in the year 2000, bringing the number of Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a involved in the incident who have been pardoned to 40.

The Government announced additional infrastructure projects to support its policy of "balanced development" within different regions that were historically marginalized and undeveloped like the Shi'a and Ismaili areas of the Eastern Province and Najran Province, respectively. Projects included the construction of a community center, roads, dams, a university, and technical colleges for men and women.

The Government also appointed five more Shi'a judges to the Ja'afari courts in the Eastern Province, bringing the total number of Shi'a judges to seven, and one Shi'a and one Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a to the board of the HRC.

During the reporting period, authorities continued to permit a greater degree of freedom to Shi'a in the Eastern Province city of Qatif, allowing religious practices and gatherings that were restricted or prevented in the past. For example, in January 2007 observances of Ashura took place in Qatif that were the largest and most public in years. In addition, there was also wider practice of ritual self-flagellation, a practice that the Government has sought to discourage; many pictures of revered imams were displayed openly in the shop windows; and large groups of Shi'a gathered to hear Shi'a clerics speak at husseiniyat, purchase books and other religious paraphernalia, and participate in marches in commemoration of Imam Hussayn's death.

There were fewer reports of Government officials confiscating religious materials and no reports that customs officials confiscated religious materials from travelers, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Individuals were able to bring personal Bibles, crosses, and religious materials, such as DVDs, through the airport in Jeddah and more Shi'a texts and paraphernalia through the airport in Dhahran and via the Bahrain causeway. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggested there was a decrease in both long-term detentions and deportations of non-Muslims for religious reasons.

There were reports that the HRC made greater efforts to connect with the Shi'a communities through public outreach to the Eastern Province. In addition, the HRC announced in April 2007 a joint program with the CPVPV to create a curriculum and training program for all CPVPV branches on working with the public.

The Government also encouraged dialogue about religious issues through the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue. Established in 2003 to "secure a channel for the responsible expression of opinion," the Dialogue offered ordinary Saudis the rare opportunity to share their opinions with public officials during televised discussions. There were reports of very frank discussions at the Dialogue sessions that took place during the reporting period, including unprecedented accusations of corruption against a Sunni public official by a minority Shi'a at a 2007 gathering in the Eastern Province.

On November 4, 2006, the Final Communiqué of the preparatory meeting for the Sixth National Dialogue was issued, which called for "establishing the concept of dialogue in schools and promoting tolerance and moderation." The Sixth National Dialogue Forum, held later that month, was entitled "Education: Reality and Promises." This Dialogue produced a "road map" for educational reform, including the revision of textbooks, curricula, and teaching methods to promote tolerance. The Dialogue was conducted in all 13 provinces with 800 to 1,000 participants in each region representing a range of perspectives. This Dialogue showed that gaps existed in natural sciences education, vocational training, and teaching methodology.

As a result of this Dialogue, the Government launched the King Abdullah Project for the Development of Public Education in February 2007 and a vocational infrastructure and training program in April 2007. On February 13, 2007, the King Abdullah Project for the Development of Public Education, approved a $2.4 billion (SAR 9 billion), 6-year project to transform the Kingdom's public education system. The project focuses on improving the educational environment, extra-curricular activities, teacher training, and curricula development. This new project complements other Government initiatives to reform the education system. Although the project was announced in February 2007, academic experts were still developing the project's executive plan at the end of the reporting period, and final plans were not expected until late 2007.

During the reporting year, senior Saudi officials reiterated that the Government plans to reform the education system. These plans include revisions to the curricula, new teacher training to update teachers on teaching methods and to ensure that tolerance is promoted within the education system, and revising the textbooks within 1 to 2 years to remove intolerant references that disparage Muslims and non-Muslims or that promote hatred toward other religious groups. Anecdotal evidence suggested that changes made in 2006 and 2007 to the education system focused on updating teaching methods, including the use of increased class participation, active problem solving methods, and small group workshops, but did not include revising substantive material.

In the October 10, 2006, *Saudi Gazette*, the Ministry of Education announced that it was creating new religious curricula to "achieve moderation among the students and teachers and encourage thinking, creativity, and interpretation." The Government also took limited measures to remove what it deemed to be disparaging references to other religious traditions from some educational curricula. Some 2006–07 primary school textbooks, for instance, were found to be more tolerant than previous textbooks and had fewer negative references to non-Muslims. The Government also stated a new policy to prohibit the use of Government funds or distribution channels to publish or promote textbooks that contain intolerant references toward other religious groups.

On March 5, 2007, the civil service announced it would dismiss teachers who espouse extremist views.

In April 2007 King Abdullah announced that the Government would allocate more freedom to private school curricula development.

The Government proceeded with programs to reduce the spread of extremist ideology. The MOIA monitored mosque sermons countrywide and there are reports that Government officials banned loudspeaker broadcasts of Sunni clerics' lectures in Sunni regions known for religious extremism. MOIA officials stated in June 2007 that some mosque imams were retrained and others were fired for promoting ex-

tremist ideas and intolerance. Moreover, NSHR stated that it received complaints in December 2006 from Riyadh-area imams who were dismissed by the MOIA, although there are conflicting reports about the reasons for the dismissals. In addition, the MOIA announced plans to monitor materials used within religious summer camps, previously known for spreading intolerant ideas to school children. Furthermore, the Government-run television network continued broadcasting programs to combat extremist and terrorist ideology.

Moreover, during the reporting period, senior Government and religious leaders, including the Grand Mufti, articulated their commitment to religious tolerance and cooperation, to prevent the rise of religious extremism. On April 14, 2007, the *Arab News* reported that King Abdullah told the Shura Council that internal strife, including sectarian disputes, was a "threat to national unity and the security of the state." In the same speech, he identified the sectarian conflicts in Iraq and Lebanon as the greatest threats in the Arab world, underscoring his commitment to supporting religious tolerance within and outside of the country's borders. On April 10, 2007, local newspapers reported that Interior Minister Prince Nayif called on religious scholars to start a campaign against extremists in the country. On November 24, 2006, *Al-Watan* newspaper reported that Islamic Affairs Minister Saleh Al-Sheikh called for moderation and tolerance, and criticized the preaching of certain Islamic preachers, which leads the youth to extremism. During his November 1, 2006, visit to Najran Province, King Abdullah said, "The state does not discriminate between one province and another or between one citizen and another, and those who tried to drive a wedge between the state and its citizens have failed."

The NSHR is the only human rights NGO officially licensed by the Government. Formed in March 2004, NSHR addresses a range of human rights violations, including limits on religious freedom and mutawwa'in abuses. Reportedly two of NSHR's founders and two board members are Shi'a, including one Sulaimani Ismaili Shi'a.

According to the 2007 NSHR annual report, the NSHR received more than 8,568 complaints over the previous 3 years. Furthermore, the NSHR stated it processed 3,516 of these cases from November 20, 2004, to June 25, 2006. More current statistics are not available, but the most common cases typically involved labor complaints (19 percent), prisoners (15 percent), and family status and family violence matters (15 percent).

NSHR said it did not officially address religious minority cases, but informally its members were trying to help affected individuals. For example, after two Shi'a teachers in the Eastern Province claimed that they were transferred to lower-ranking positions based on their religious beliefs, the local NSHR branch contacted the Government and helped the two teachers return to their previous positions. The NSHR claimed that it had not received direct requests for assistance from Ahmadiyya, a minority Muslim group, and that Ismaili concerns in Najran stemmed from political, not religious issues.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

As a deeply conservative and devout Muslim society, there is intense pressure within the country to conform to societal norms. The majority of citizens support a state based on Islamic law, although there were 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 one of its paramount functions. Moreover, the conservative religious leadership also exerted pressure on the state to adhere to a conservative interpretation of Islam.

On January 21, 2007, former Senior Council of Ulema member Abdullah bin Abdulrahman bin Jibrin called Shi'a "rafidah" (rejectionists) and claimed that Shi'a work with Christians to kill Sunni Muslims, especially in Iraq. He also claimed that Shi'a are liars, apostates, and heretics. He called for the expulsion of Shi'a from Muslim countries. On December 7, 2006, prominent Sunni religious commentator and former professor at Imam Mohammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, Abdul Rahman Nasser Al-Barak, issued a fatwa attacking Shi'a, calling them "rejectionists" and "bearing all the characteristics of infidels." He accused them of apostasy and heresy. In each case the Government failed to criticize the speakers or their statements publicly.

On November 27, 2006, *Al-Riyadh, Al-Hayat*, and *Al-Watan* reported that a "group of extremists" raided the theater, disturbed an audience, and forcibly ended a play at Al-Yamamah College. The play was "A Moderate Who Lacks Moderation," by Ahmad Al-Eissa, president of Al-Yamamah College. Security forces intervened to end clashes between the audience and the extremists. The extremists refused to leave the theater after the show was cancelled, despite shots fired by the police to

disperse them. The extremists continued their physical attacks on the organizers, reporters, and photographers; subsequently a number of them were arrested.

The January 16, 2007, edition of *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* reported that a group of religious conservatives interrupted a film screening of "At Five in the Afternoon," hosted by the Eastern Province Literary Society, an organization approved by the Ministry of Culture and Information. The film discusses the Taliban and women's rights, and this group of conservative men thought it was an inappropriate film to screen publicly. By the end of the reporting period, the Society had not shown the film. According to *Al-Watan*, the Ministry of Culture and Information's Deputy Minister for Cultural Affairs stated that literary clubs can show films, if suitable for the public.

Discrimination based on religion is a factor in mistreatment of foreign workers by citizen employers and co-workers. In its 2007 report, NSHR claimed it had received complaints from foreign workers about their treatment by sponsors. There were also reports that some sponsors withheld pay and iqama renewal based on religious factors. In addition, there were reports that some non-Muslim foreign workers were targeted by Muslim co-workers and accused falsely of proselytizing, knowing that the non-Muslims would be censured and possibly deported.

Anyone has the right to inform the mutawwa'in of behavior that they believe promotes vice or is otherwise contrary to public order and morality. Then the mutawwa'in investigate these complaints. There were reports that religious vigilantes unaffiliated with the muttawwa'in, and acting on their own, harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners. The Government has stated that it does not tolerate this behavior, and in some instances it took action against these people. For example, Eastern Province officials took immediate action in July 2006 to disband a group of unofficial mutawwa'in who committed numerous acts of harassment against foreigners in Al-Khobar's commercial district. However, there were other cases where the Government took no 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. U.S. Government policy is to press the Government consistently to honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, and promote tolerance toward non-Muslims.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador met with senior Government and religious leaders regarding religious freedom, and raised specific cases of violations with senior officials. Senior U.S. officials discussed with the Government their policies concerning religious practice and tolerance. They encouraged the Government to honor policies to halt the dissemination of intolerant literature and extremist ideology within the country and around the world, protect private worship for all religious groups, curb harassment of religious practice groups, and promote tolerance towards all religious groups. Senior U.S. officials supported provisions calling for religious tolerance, including elimination of discrimination against religious minorities, improved human rights standards, and state accountability.

Senior U.S. officials 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 country's conservative form of Sunni Islam. U.S. Government officials also raised their concerns over the dissemination of intolerant literature and an extremist ideology with the Government. In addition, Embassy officers met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials at various other times to discuss matters pertaining to religious freedom.

In November 2006 the Secretary of State redesignated Saudi Arabia as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act. In connection with this designation, Secretary Rice issued a waiver of sanctions "to further the purposes of the Act."

SYRIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government imposes restrictions on this right. While there is no official state religion, the Constitution requires that the president be Muslim and stipulates that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation. The Constitution provides for freedom of faith and religious practice, provided that the religious rites do not disturb the public order.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to monitor the activities of all groups, including religious groups, and discouraged proselytism, which it deemed a threat to relations among religious groups. The Government also continued to discriminate against the Jehovah's Witnesses.

There were occasional reports of minor tensions between religious groups, some attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 71,498 square miles and a population of 19 million. Sunnis represent 74 percent of the population and are present throughout the country. Other Muslim groups, including Alawi, Ismailis, and Shi'a, together constitute 13 percent of the population. The Druze account for 3 percent of the population. Various Christian denominations comprise the remaining 10 percent.

The majority of Christians belong to the Eastern groups that have existed in the country since the earliest days of Christianity. The main Eastern groups belong to the autonomous Orthodox churches, the Uniate churches (which recognize the Roman Catholic Pope), or the independent Nestorian Church. There is also a small Yezidi population, and there are approximately 40 Jews. It is difficult to obtain precise population estimates for religious sub-groups 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. Most citizens of Armenian descent belong to the Armenian (Apostolic) Church, which uses an Armenian liturgy. The largest Uniate church in the country is the Greek Catholic Church. Other Uniate denominations include the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, and the Chaldean Catholic Church, which derives from the Nestorian Church. Protestant Christian denominations include Baptists and Mennonites. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is also present.

Most Christians live in the urban centers in and around Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Lattakia, although significant numbers live in the Hasaka governorate in the northeast. A majority of Alawis live in the mountainous areas of the coastal Lattakia governorate. A significant majority of the Druze population resides in the rugged Jabal al-Arab region in the southeast, and most are located in the southern governorate of Suweida. The few remaining Jews are concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo. Yezidis are found primarily in the northeast.

Foreign missionary groups are present but must operate discreetly.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, Jehovah's Witnesses are banned, and any activities by the group must be conducted without attracting the Government's attention. There is no official state religion; however, the Constitution requires that the President be Muslim and stipulates that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation. While there is no civil law prohibiting proselytism, the Government discourages it and occasionally prosecutes missionaries for "posing a threat to the relations among religious groups" when they have engaged in such activities. Most charges of this kind carried sentences of imprisonment from 5 years to life, although often such sentences were reduced to 1 or 2 years.

Membership in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is illegal, as is membership in any "Salafist" organization, a designation in Syrian parlance that denotes Saudi-inspired fundamentalism. The Government and the State Security Court have not defined the exact parameters of what constitutes a Salafist or why it is illegal. Affiliation with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is punishable by death, although in practice the sentence is typically commuted to 12 years' imprisonment.

All religions and religious orders must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all religious and nonreligious group meetings, except for worship. The registration process can be complicated and lengthy, but the Government usually allows groups to operate informally while awaiting its response.

Recognized religious groups, including all Government-recognized Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities, receive free utilities and are exempt from real estate taxes and personal property taxes on official vehicles.

There is a *de facto* separation of religion and state in that the Government generally refrains from involvement in strictly religious matters and religious groups tend not to participate in internal political affairs. However, during the reporting

period, the Government increased its support for the practice and study of Government-sanctioned, moderate forms of Islam, and Syrian state radio also began broadcasting the dawn and afternoon Muslim prayers, in addition to its traditional broadcast of noon prayers. Syrian state television also broadcasts recitations from the Qur'an in the morning.

The Government permitted the use of religious language in public spaces, including the placement of banners bearing religious slogans at the site of prominent public landmarks during religious holidays. However, unlike the previous reporting period, there were no examples of prominent religious figures addressing Government functions.

Government policy officially disavows sectarianism of any kind; however, religion can be a factor in determining career opportunities. For example, Alawis hold dominant positions in the security services and military that are disproportionate to their percentage of the population. On the other hand, because their religion is banned, Jehovah's Witnesses are discriminated against in the area of employment.

The April 2007 parliamentary elections for the Peoples Assembly saw an increase in the number of Islamic clerics elected to the Parliament from one in 2003 to three.

During the reporting period, the Government continued to promote Islamic banking. In early 2007 two Islamic banks were allowed to conduct Initial Public Offerings: The Cham Islamic Bank and the Syrian International Islamic Bank. In addition, at the Second Islamic Banking Conference held on March 13, 2007, Central Bank Governor Adib Maleh recommended that the Ministry of Islamic Trusts encourage Syrians to invest in Islamic banking and pay the zakat (religious tax) through Islamic banks. The Government also licensed the first Islamic insurance company, Al Aqila, in March 2007.

In February 2007 the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs issued a decision to dissolve a women's nongovernmental organization (NGO) known as Social Initiative. There were scattered reports in local and regional media that a number of conservative Muslim clerics pressured the Government to close the NGO because the clerics took exception to a questionnaire the NGO distributed to women asking their opinions on the personal status law.

The Government is intolerant of, and suppresses, extremist forms of Islam. Accordingly, it selects for religious leadership positions moderate Muslims who have no intention of altering the secular nature of the Government. Sheikh Ahmed Baderedin Hassoun, the Grand Mufti of Syria, continued to call on Muslims to stand up to Islamic fundamentalism and has urged leaders of the various religious groups to engage in regular dialogues for mutual understanding.

All schools are officially Government-run and non-sectarian, although in practice some schools are run by the Christian and Druze communities. There is mandatory religious instruction in schools for all religious groups, with Government-approved teachers and curricula. Religious instruction is provided on Islam and Christianity only, and courses are divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. Groups that participate in Islamic courses include Sunni, Shi'a, Alawi, Ismaili, Yezidi, and Druze. Although Arabic is the official language in public schools, the Government permitted the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic), and Chaldean in some schools on the basis that these are "liturgical languages." There is no mandatory religious study at the university level.

Religious groups are subject to their respective religious laws for matters dealing with personal status. However, at the time of this report, the Government had not yet passed legislation pertaining to personal status issues for Orthodox Christians.

A new Civil Law for Catholics went into effect on July 5, 2006. It contains strict rules on the order of inheritance with regard to the relatives of the deceased, as well as on the jurisdiction of Christian courts. Additionally, there are laws that establish the legal marriage age and prohibit some instances of mixed marriage for Catholics. The law gives the bishop of a diocese and the Christian courts expanded authority to determine the validity of an adoption. The new law also clarifies parental rights and inheritance rules between adopting parents and the adopted child. The Catholic leadership generally received the law positively.

The personal status law on divorce for Muslims in Syria is based on Shari'a religious law, and some of its provisions are interpreted in a manner that discriminates against women.

Syrian law specifically provides for reduced or commuted sentences in "honor crimes," which involve violent assaults by a direct male relative against a female. Section 548 of the Syrian penal code stipulates that a man can be absolved of any killing if he witnesses a direct female relative in the act of adultery. Moreover, a man's sentence for murder will be greatly reduced if he sees a direct female relative in a "suspicious situation" with a member of the opposite sex who is not a relative.

Under Syria's interpretation of Shari'a, the legal standard for men to be granted a divorce is much lower than that for women. Husbands may also claim adultery as grounds for divorce, while wives often face a higher legal standard when presenting the same case. A man can only be found guilty of adultery if the act takes place inside the home. If a wife requests a divorce from her husband, she may be denied alimony and the return of her dowry in some instances.

In the event of divorce, a woman loses the right to custody of her sons when they reach the age of 13, and her daughters when they reach the age of 15, regardless of religion. Women can also lose custody before this age if they remarry, work outside the home, or move outside of the city or country. In such cases the custody of the children reverts to the maternal grandmother until the age of 13 and 15 respectively. After that, custody reverts back to the father until the children reach the age of majority.

Inheritance for all citizens except Catholics is based on Shari'a. Accordingly, married women usually are granted half the inheritance share male heirs receive. In all communities, however, male heirs must provide financial support to unmarried female relatives who inherit less. For example, a brother would inherit his and his unmarried sister's share from their parents' estate, and he is obligated to provide for the sister's well-being with that inheritance. If the brother fails to do so, she has the right to sue. Polygamy is legal for Muslim men but is practiced only by a minority of them.

The Government generally does not prohibit links between its citizens and co-religionists in other countries or between its citizens and the international hierarchies that govern some religious groups; however, it prohibits contact between the Jewish community and Jews in Israel.

The following holy days are national holidays: Western Christmas, Orthodox and Western Easter, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Islamic New Year, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In January 2007, the Government licensed the so-called Quabasis to hold their female-only Islamic study groups inside of mosques. Until then, they were held in private homes. Some regard the licensing as a cynical attempt by the security services to make it easier to monitor the Quabasis rather than to help facilitate their activities. However, Quabasis groups are still allowed to meet in private residences.

Proselytism is not prohibited by civil law; however, the Government discourages it as a potential threat to the relations among religious groups. Nevertheless, foreign missionaries were present, operating discreetly. There were no reported cases of anyone being prosecuted for posing a threat to the relations among religious groups during the period covered by this report. Instead, there were several reports that the Government gave the Shi'a favorable treatment and allowed Shi'a missionaries to construct mosques and convert Sunnis to Shiites.

All groups, religious and nonreligious, are subject to surveillance and monitoring by Government security services. The Government particularly considers militant Islam a threat to the regime and closely follows the practice of its adherents. While the Government allows many mosques to be built, it monitors and controls sermons and often closes mosques between prayers.

In Damascus, the Government is building a road through the old city to a major Shi'a mosque. To complete the road, the Government plans to tear down several predominantly Sunni residential complexes in the old city. The country's Sunni clerics and communities have criticized these plans.

Religious minorities, with the exception of Jews, are represented among the senior officer corps. In keeping with the Government's secular policy, though, the military does not have a chaplain 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.

The Government canceled an Islamic religious program that had been broadcast just before the major weekly prayers were shown on Government-run television. On April 20, 2007, the son of the late Grand Mufti, Sheikh Salah Khuftaro, in a speech at the Abu Nur Islamic Center, denounced the Information Minister for this decision.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Both European diplomats and human rights organizations characterized the level of repression against alleged Islamists as about the same as in previous reporting periods, although some religious leaders insisted they faced increased repression at the hands of the Government.

During the reporting period, human rights organizations documented the arrest of at least 30 persons for alleged ties to Islamist groups. The Government rarely furnished documentation on the number of detained persons. Human rights groups reported on Syrians who were arrested or detained for alleged ties to Islamist groups in previous years but whose detention has only recently been made public.

The Supreme State Security Court sentenced at least 80 alleged Islamists to lengthy prison sentences. Human rights groups and diplomats from European Embassies estimated that at least hundreds of alleged Islamists remain detained in prisons, security service detention centers, or other secret detention facilities.

The Government continued to hold an unknown number of members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists as political detainees and prisoners. Many alleged Islamists not connected to the Muslim Brotherhood were charged and convicted for "membership in a Salafist organization." Arrests of alleged Islamists and, in some cases, convictions, were motivated primarily by the Government's view of militant Islamists as potential threats to regime stability.

At the end of the reporting period there were unconfirmed reports that on May 14, 2007, journalist Adel Mahfoudh was sentenced to 6 months in prison. On February 7, 2006, Syrian authorities arrested him after he published an article encouraging dialogue between Muslims and the cartoon artists who created caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad for the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. He was released on bail March 12, 2006, re-arrested on May 17, 2006, and re-released on bail in September 2006.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

During the reporting period, there were no reports of incidents of harassment or property damage against Jews in Damascus. However, Government-owned-and-controlled media printed anti-Semitic articles and editorial cartoons depicting demonic images of Jews, stereotypical images of Jews along with Jewish symbols, and comparisons of Israeli leaders and Israel to Hitler and the Nazis throughout the year. These expressions occurred primarily in the Government-owned-and-controlled daily newspaper *Tishrin*.

For instance, on February 4, 2007, *Tishrin* published an article accusing Jewish leaders of collusion with the Nazi party for the purposes of "inflating" the Holocaust. The article alleged that Jews wanted the Holocaust to justify immigration to "the Promised Land."

On January 28, 2007, *Tishrin* published an article attempting to draw similarities and connections between Zionists and Nazis, stating that both movements are racist and that the two cooperated to fulfill their racist objectives.

On July 16, 2006, Dr. Ghazi Hussein wrote in *Tishrin* that Zionist circles focus on the Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust while excluding Gypsies and Poles. Spreading this concept reinforces the Zionist idea that Jews need a Jewish state with a strong army, and need, as well, to displace the Palestinian people and erase their identity. He also wrote that the Nazi Holocaust is being used to cover up the holocaust Israel is perpetrating against the Palestinian people.

On July 10, 2006, *Tishrin* published an article by Dr. Sayah Azzam, who wrote that Israel has used the Holocaust and charges of anti-Semitism to attract Jewish immigrants and to blackmail the West.

Also in July 2006, on Syrian television, Syrian Deputy Minister of Religious Endowment, Dr. Muhammad 'Abd Al-Sattar, proclaimed that Jews are cursed. The Qur'an, he explained, paints the people of Israel in a "sinister and dark way." He proceeded to use the national station to call Jews the "descendents of apes and pigs," claiming that "terms that are closer to animals than humans" are more fit to describe them.

The Government primarily cites tense relations with Israel as the reason for barring Jewish citizens from employment in the civil service or serving in the armed forces, and for exempting them from military service obligations. Jews are the only religious minority group whose passports and identity cards note their religion, and they must obtain the permission of the security services before traveling abroad.

Jews 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 under a law against exporting any of the country's historical and cultural treasures. This poses a serious problem for the dwindling Jewish community concerned about the preservation of its ancient religious texts.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On June 24, 2007, Syrian Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Baderedin Hassoun called on Jews of Syrian origin to return to Syria, claiming that the property and synagogues of Jews who left Syria remained as they were and would be placed at the disposal of their original owners.

In March 2007, during a lecture at Damascus University, Syrian Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmad Baderedin Hassoun called for amending the laws that allow honor killings, which he said violate the Islamic spirit of the law.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were occasional reports of minor tensions between religious groups, mainly attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation.

In March 2007 there were reports of riots in Hassakeh Province between Christians and predominantly Muslim Kurds. There were reports of three deaths. It was unclear whether there was any religious basis to the conflict.

No official statistics were kept on honor crimes, but there were scattered reports of them in the local media. Most prominent was the case of Zahra Ezzo. On January 31, 2007, Ezzo was murdered by her brother after being kidnapped and forced to run away by a friend of the family. The incidence of honor crimes is believed to be considerably higher in rural areas.

Social conventions and religious and theological proscriptions made conversion relatively rare, especially Muslim-to-Christian conversion. In many cases, societal pressure forced such converts 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 has limited contact with the Government; however, the Charge d'affaires and other Embassy officials met with religious leaders and adherents of almost all religious groups at the national, regional, and local levels to convey to the public U.S. support for freedom of religion.

TUNISIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion unless they disturb the public order; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on this right. The Constitution declares the country's determination to adhere to the teachings of Islam, stipulates that Islam is the official state religion, and that the President be Muslim. The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion and prohibits efforts to proselytize Muslims. It restricts the wearing of Islamic headscarves (hijab) in Government offices, and discourages women from wearing the hijab on public streets and at certain public gatherings.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Domestic and international human rights organizations reported an increase in reports of police harassment of women wearing the hijab and men with traditional Islamic dress and beards.

Although changing religions is legal, there is great societal pressure against conversion of Muslims to other religions. Muslims who convert face social ostracism. There were reports of expulsion of a convert from home and several reports of beatings by family members or acquaintances.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 63,170 square miles and a population of 10 million. The population is 99 percent Muslim. There is a small indigenous "Maraboutic" Muslim community that belongs to spiritual brotherhoods known as "turuq." There are 200 Baha'is in the country, and their presence dates back a century.

The Christian community, composed of foreign residents and a small group of native-born citizens of European or Arab descent, numbers 25,000 and is dispersed throughout the country. According to a reliable source, there are 20,000 Catholics, 500 of whom regularly practice. The Roman Catholic Church operates 12 churches, 9 schools, several libraries, and 2 clinics. In addition to holding religious services,

the Catholic Church opened a monastery, freely organized cultural activities, and performed charitable work throughout the country. According to church leaders, there are 2,000 Protestant practicing Christians, including a few hundred citizens who have converted to Christianity. The Russian Orthodox Church has approximately 100 practicing members and operates a church in Tunis and another in Bizerte. The French Reform Church maintains a church in Tunis, with a congregation of 140 primarily foreign members. The Anglican Church has a church in Tunis with several hundred predominantly foreign members. There are 50 Seventh-day Adventists. The 30-member Greek Orthodox Church maintained 3 churches (in Tunis, Sousse, and Djerba). There are also 50 Jehovah's Witnesses, of whom half are foreign residents and half are native-born citizens. Occasionally, Catholic and Protestant religious groups held services in private residences or other locations.

Judaism is the country's third largest religion with 1,500 members. One-third of the Jewish population lives in and around the capital, and is descended predominantly from Italian and Spanish immigrants. The remainder lives on the island of Djerba, where the Jewish community dates back 2,500 years.

The Government allows a small number of foreign religious charitable nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to operate and provide social services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion unless they disturb the public order; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on this right. The Constitution declares the country's determination to adhere to the teachings of Islam, stipulates that Islam is the official state religion, and that the President be Muslim. The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion and prohibits proselytizing by non-Muslims. A 1981 Government decree restricts the wearing of the hijab in Government offices, and discourages women from wearing it on public streets and at certain public gatherings.

No statutory prohibitions against conversion from Islam to another faith exist, and the Government does not require registration of conversion; however, Government officials occasionally discriminated against converts from Islam to another religion, using bureaucratic means to discourage conversion.

The Government controls and subsidizes mosques and pays the salaries of imams (clerics). The President appoints the Grand Mufti of the Republic. The 1988 Law on Mosques provides that only personnel appointed by the Government may lead activities in mosques and stipulates that mosques must remain closed except during prayer times and authorized religious ceremonies, such as marriages or funerals. However, several historically significant mosques are partially open to tourists and other visitors for a few hours per day, several days a week. New mosques may be built in accordance with national urban planning regulations; however, upon completion, they become the property of the Government.

The Government 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 allows the Jewish community freedom of worship and pays the salary of the Grand Rabbi. It also provides security for all synagogues and partially subsidizes restoration and maintenance costs for some. Government employees were responsible for lawn upkeep of the Jewish cemetery in Tunis.

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. There is also a small private Jewish school in Tunis.

Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools, but the religious curriculum for secondary school students also includes the history of Judaism and Christianity. The Zeitouna Qur'anic School is part of the Government's national university system, which is otherwise secular.

The Government promoted interfaith understanding by sponsoring regular conferences and seminars on religious tolerance. For example, on May 7–9, 2007, the Government organized an international symposium to promote religious tolerance with the theme of "Reason and Faith for a World of Solidarity." It also facilitated

and promoted the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the El-Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, celebrated on the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omer.

In January 2007 the Government-funded "University Chair for Dialogue Between Civilizations and Religions" held a seminar featuring a lecture and panel discussion on interreligious understanding led by a notable British priest which promoted religious tolerance.

The number of Jewish pilgrims to the annual Ghriba pilgrimage continued to rise. Four thousand to five thousand Jewish pilgrims participated in May 2007. According to local Jewish leaders, 20 to 25 percent of these pilgrims were Israeli citizens traveling under the relaxed travel policies that went into effect in 2004.

The Government recognizes the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr as official holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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, and three Local Spiritual Assemblies, the local governing body, have been elected since 2004.

The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, and it continued to refuse to register the Islamist party An-Nahdha. The Government maintained tight surveillance over Islamists. The Government refused to issue passports to some alleged Islamists. The Government maintains that only the courts possess the power to revoke passports; however, reports indicated that it rarely observed this separation of powers in politically sensitive cases.

The Government recognizes all Christian religious organizations that were established before independence in 1956, but did not permit other Christian groups to establish new churches. Efforts to proselytize Muslims were viewed as disturbing the public order and thus illegal. Foreign missionaries operated in the country, but were not permitted to proselytize. Whereas authorities previously deported non-Muslim foreigners suspected of proselytizing and did not permit them to return, more recent reports indicated that the Government preferred to deny suspected missionaries visa renewal or to pressure their employers not to extend their contracts. However, during the reporting period there were no reported cases of official action against persons suspected of proselytizing.

While there are no legal restrictions against conversion from Islam to other religions, some local officials occasionally harass converts to discourage conversion. In 2006 there was a report that a Christian citizen was told by a local security official that it was illegal to be a Christian, and threatened with imprisonment.

In previous years there were occasional reports that when seeking renewal of passports, the process was inexplicably delayed for some Christians, although passports were subsequently issued. There were no reports of such incidents during the reporting period.

Although the Government has not granted the 1999 request of the Association of the Jewish Community of Tunisia to be registered, the President and board of governors continued to meet weekly, in keeping with the law covering the application process. During the reporting period, the Government permitted the association to operate and perform religious activities and charity work unhindered. By the end of the reporting period the Government had not acted on a request for registration by a Jewish religious organization in Djerba; however, the group continued to operate and perform religious activities and charitable work unobstructed.

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 subject to the same restrictions on freedom of speech and the press as secular groups. There is no law requiring that the Government approve all locally produced printed material prior to publication or distribution. However, Christian groups said the Government generally did not grant permission to publish and distribute Arabic-language Christian texts. For publications printed abroad, distributors must deposit copies with the chief prosecutor and other ministries prior to their public release. Christian groups reported that they were able to distribute previously approved religious publications in European languages without difficulty, but the Government allowed only established churches to distribute religious publications to parishioners. It considers other groups' distribution of religious documents to be a "threat to public order," and thus illegal.

On occasion the Government banned foreign print media that contained what it considered offensive or sensitive articles on Islam. For example, the Government banned the September 19, 2006, issue of the French daily *Le Figaro* that contained an opinion piece about remarks on Islam made by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Government restricts the wearing of the hijab in Government offices, and there were reports of police requiring women to remove them in offices, on the street, at universities, and at some public gatherings; however, it was nonetheless common to see women wearing the hijab in a variety of public settings. The Government characterizes the hijab as a "garment of foreign origin having a sectarian connotation" and restricts its use in public institutions to "observe impartiality required of officials in their professional relations with others."

In September 2006, in conjunction with a campaign by Government officials to speak publicly against use of the hijab, the police intensified efforts to apply the 1981 decree prohibiting women from wearing it in official buildings, schools, and universities. In addition, some women were stopped in public places, detained, and told to remove their hijab. During an October 27, 2006 meeting of the Government-loyal NGO National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT), senior UNFT officials demanded that all women in the audience remove their veils, on occasion tugging at their veils and verbally abusing them. In several cases school officials took disciplinary action to punish and deter hijab use by attempting to have women sign written oaths renouncing its use.

There also were frequent reports that police harassed or detained men with beards and/or who wore traditional Islamic-style clothing. According to human rights lawyers, the Government regularly questioned and detained some Muslims who were observed praying frequently in mosques.

The authorities have instructed imams to espouse Government social and economic programs during prayer times in mosques and informed them that those who used mosques to "spread ideologies" would be prosecuted.

Applying customary law based on Shari'a, the Government forbids Muslim women from marrying outside their religion inside the country; however, if a man converts to Islam, he may marry a Muslim woman. Marriages of Muslim women to non-Muslim men performed abroad are generally recognized by the Government. However, on occasion the Government did not recognize such marriages as legal, forcing the couple to seek a court ruling. While on most occasions judges ruled that marriages performed abroad were legal, judges sometimes declared them void in the country. Muslim men and non-Muslim women who are married cannot 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 were known to override codified family or inheritance laws if their interpretation of Shari'a contradicted it. For example, codified laws provide women with custody over their minor children; however, when a case was contested by the father, judges generally refused to grant women permission to leave the country with their children, holding that Shari'a appoints the father as the head of the family, and that he must grant permission for the children to travel.

Generally, Shari'a-based interpretation of civil law was applied only in some family cases. Some families avoid the strictures of Shari'a on inheritance by executing sales contracts between parents and children to ensure that sons and daughters receive equal shares of property.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to international NGOs and domestic human rights organizations, scores of persons were arrested by police beginning in late December 2006 following exchanges of gunfire between security forces and members of a "Salafist" armed group. Some human rights groups and defense lawyers alleged that more than 1,000 mostly young men had been arrested on terrorism charges after the "Salafist" incidents. Without offering proof of their claims, these groups also asserted that there was not sufficient evidence for some of the arrests, that security forces may have extracted confessions under torture, and that some of those arrested had reportedly been targeted because of their Islamic appearance, their frequent attendance at mosques, or other actions related to their practice of 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.

Anti-Semitism

Privately owned newspapers on occasion published cartoons and articles critical of Israel. Some cartoons used derogatory caricatures of Jews to portray the State of Israel and Israeli interests. These cartoons were all drawn by cartoonists outside of the country and reprinted locally.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Although changing religions is legal, there was great societal pressure against Muslim conversion to other religions. Muslims who converted faced social ostracism. There were reports of expulsion of a convert from home and several reports of beatings by family members or acquaintances.

Despite a history of social pressure by middle and upper class secularists to discourage women from wearing the hijab, anecdotal evidence suggested that, for a variety of social and religious reasons, the number of young middle class urban women choosing to wear the hijab continued to rise 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.

The U.S. Embassy maintains good relations with leaders of majority and minority religious groups throughout the country, and the U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials met regularly with Government officials and Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious leaders throughout the reporting period. The U.S. Special Envoy to Combat and Monitor Anti-Semitism visited in December 2006 and met with religious and Government officials and members of the Jewish community. The Embassy fostered regular exchanges that included components designed to highlight U.S. traditions of religious tolerance and pluralism.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Federal Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of the country.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 32,300 square miles and a permanent resident population of 4.1 million, with 78.1 percent of the country's population being noncitizens, according to the 2005 census. Of the citizens, 85 percent are Sunni Muslim and 15 percent are Shi'a. Foreigners are predominantly from South and Southeast Asia, although there are substantial numbers from the Middle East, Europe, Central Asia, the former Commonwealth of Independent States, and North America. According to a ministry report, which collected census data, 76 percent of the total population is Muslim, 9 percent is Christian, and 15 percent is "other." Unofficial figures estimate that at least 15 percent of the population is Hindu, 5 percent is Buddhist, and 5 percent belong to other religious groups, including Parsi, Bahá'í, and Sikh. These estimates differ from census figures because census figures do not count "temporary" visitors and workers, and Bahá'ís and Druze are counted as Muslim.

There were foreign missionaries operating in the country. The Government does not permit foreign missionaries to proselytize Muslims; however, they have performed humanitarian (missionary) work in the country for several decades.

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 respected this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions.

The Government controls virtually all Sunni mosques, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the freedom of assembly and association, thereby limiting the ability of religious groups without dedicated religious buildings to worship and conduct business. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of all seven of the constituent emirates of the Federal union. The Government recognizes a small number of Christian denominations, through the issuance of land-use permits, for the construction and operation of churches.

The Government funds or subsidizes almost 95 percent of Sunni mosques and employs all Sunni imams; 5 percent of Sunni mosques are considered private, and several mosques have large private endowments. The Government distributes guidance on religious sermons to mosques and clergy, 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 may receive funds from the Government upon request. Shi'a imams are Government-appointed only in the Emirate of Dubai.

There is a dual system of Shari'a (Islamic) courts for criminal and family law matters and secular courts for civil law matters. Shi'a Muslims in Dubai may pursue Shi'a family law cases through a special Shi'a council rather than the Shari'a courts. 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.

After a 2006 cabinet reorganization, the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Endowments, which operated as the central Federal regulatory authority for Muslim imams and mosques, was divided into two separate bodies. The Islamic Affairs and Endowments section was split from the Ministry of Justice and became the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments. This new General Authority took over all the duties the Islamic Affairs and Endowments section previously had under the Ministry of Justice. There are neither authority, licensing, nor registration requirements for the recognition and regulation of non-Muslim religious groups.

The Government follows a policy of tolerance toward non-Muslim religious groups and, in practice, interfered very little in their religious activities.

Non-Muslim groups can own their own houses of worship, where they can practice their religion freely, by requesting a land grant and permission from the local ruler to build a compound (the title for the land remains with the ruler). Those with land grants are not charged rental payments. The Emirate of Sharjah also waives utility payments for religious buildings. There is no national-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. Religious groups without dedicated buildings of worship often use the facilities of other religious groups or worship in private homes. There were no reports of Government interference in this common practice.

There are at least 31 Christian churches in the country built on land donated by the ruling families of the emirates in which they are located. There are two Hindu temples operating in rented commercial buildings in Dubai, one of which is used by Sikhs as well. Sikhs and Hindus living in Abu Dhabi also practice their religion in private homes. Four emirates are home to parochial Christian primary and secondary schools. The Emirate of Abu Dhabi and the Emirate of Dubai donated land for Christian cemeteries, and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi donated land for a Bahá'í cemetery. There are two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the Hindu community, one in Abu Dhabi and one in Dubai.

Non-Muslim groups raise money from among their congregations and receive financial support from abroad. Religious groups openly advertise religious functions in the press, such as holiday celebrations, memorial services, religious conventions, choral concerts, and fundraising events.

Because an orthodox interpretation of Islam considers Christians to be "people of the book" (monotheists practicing an Abrahamic religion), facilities for Christian congregations are far greater in number and size than those for other non-Muslim

communities, despite the fact that Christians are estimated to represent less than a quarter of the non-Muslim population.

In practice, the Government supports a moderate interpretation of Islam. As the state religion, Islam is favored over other religious groups and conversion to Islam is viewed favorably. A list of Muslim converts is published annually. Prisoners who convert to Islam often receive a reduction in their sentences. In Dubai, prisoners who memorize all or part of the Qur'an can receive a reduction in their sentences or a pardon, depending on the length of sentence and the number of sections memorized. Prisoners facing life sentences do not benefit from the memorization program. The ruler of the Emirate of Ajman offers a cash award for prisoners who memorize all or part of the Qur'an.

During the 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 were serving sentences from 3 to 5 years for financial crimes, immigration violations, and other relatively minor offenses; pardons reportedly were not extended to prisoners convicted of rape, killing, and kidnapping.

The Government's Religious Adviser, Ali Al-Hashemi, as well as the Director General of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments, regularly represented the country at Islamic, ecumenical, and Christian conferences, and events in other countries. Both met regularly with Christian leaders in the country.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Waqfa, Eid al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Ascension Day, and Eid al-Fitr. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims and non-Muslims alike are required by law to refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking publicly during fasting hours, out of respect for Islamic practice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, there were some restrictions.

The General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments distributes weekly guidance to both Sunni and Shi'a imams regarding subject matter, themes, and content of religious sermons, and it ensures that clergy do not deviate frequently or significantly from approved topics in their sermons. Approximately 95 percent of Sunni imams are employees of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments 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.

There was one temple for both Sikhs and Hindus in Dubai. There were no Buddhist temples; however, in places without temples, Buddhists, along with Hindus and Sikhs, conducted religious ceremonies in private homes without interference. There were only two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the large Hindu community, one in Abu Dhabi and one in Dubai. Official permission must be obtained for their use in every instance, posing a hardship for the large Hindu community. The Government does not allow temples to be built on work premises. In contrast to previous years, there were no reports that municipalities had dismantled temples built by Hindu workers in labor camps.

The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing or distributing religious literature, under penalty of criminal prosecution, imprisonment, and deportation, as it constitutes 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.

The country's sole Internet service provider, Etisalat, sometimes blocked Web sites containing religious information. These sites included information on the Bahá'í faith, Judaism, negative critiques of Islam, and testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity. The Government's Information and Privacy Law provides penalties for using the Internet to oppose Islam, inciting someone to commit sin, and using the Internet to promote a program in breach of public decency.

Immigration authorities routinely asked foreigners applying for residence permits to declare their religious affiliation on residence applications; however, the Government reportedly does not collect or analyze this information, and there have been no reports of religious affiliation affecting the issuance or renewal of visas or residence permits.

Non-Muslim religious leaders reported that customs authorities rarely questioned the entry of religious materials such as Bibles and hymnals into the country, unless

the materials were printed in Arabic. In the past, customs authorities 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 were less likely to question the importation of Christian religious items than that of other non-Muslim religious items; although, in virtually all instances, importation of the material in question eventually was permitted.

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. According to a new personal status law, women generally are granted custody of female children until they reach the age of 13 and are granted custody of male children until they reach the age of ten. 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 polygamy.

Islamic studies are mandatory in public schools (schools supported by the Federal Government primarily for citizen children) and in private schools for Muslim children. Instruction of any religion other than Islam is not permitted in public schools; however, religious groups may conduct religious instruction for their members on their religious compounds. Private schools found teaching subjects that contravene Islam, defame any religion, or contravene the nation's ethics and beliefs, may face penalties, including closure.

On December 12, 2006, the press reported that a female foreign national teacher was dismissed from school for trying to convert her Muslim pupils to Christianity. According to the school's chairman, the teacher was deported following this incident.

Although textbooks have been banned in the past for containing material offensive to Islam, there were no new reports of banned school books during the reporting period.

Since many Bahá'ís and Druze had passports that identify them as Muslims, the Ministry of Education required their children to take the prescribed Islamic studies classes.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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.

Anti-Semitism

There were some anti-Semitic or religiously intolerant editorials, op-eds and editorial cartoons in the English and Arabic-language electronic and print media. The Arabic-language press, including Government subsidized and quasi-governmental newspapers such as *Al-Ittihad, Al-Bayan*, and *Al-Khaleej*, carried editorial cartoons depicting negative images of Jews; *Al-Bayan* carried religiously intolerant articles as well.

On May 14, 2007, for example, *Al-Ittihad* carried a cartoon of "the Zionist Lobby" who was depicted as a stereotypical Jew with a hooked nose and wearing a yarmulke.

On August 2, 2006, *Al-Bayan* published an op-ed comparing "Zionism and Arabism," in which it made derogatory statements and asked, "are they (i.e. the Zionists) part of humanity?"

On July 16 and 17, 2006, *Al-Bayan* carried editorial articles comparing Israelis to Nazis.

On July 2, 2006, *Al-Ittihad* published a cartoon in which a stereotypically depicted Jew was standing astride the globe, a reference to the long-standing anti-Semitic conspiracy that Jews control the world.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 31, 2007, the Vatican and the country signed a joint communiqué to establish diplomatic relations.

On April 25–29, 2007, the Egyptian Coptic Pope Shnoudeh III attended the inauguration ceremony of a new Coptic church building in Abu Dhabi. At the ceremony, the Minister of Higher Education, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al-Nahyan, stated that the new building is an expression of the country's openness and tolerance for religions. Pope Shnoudeh lauded the country's encouragement of interfaith dialogue. On the same occasion, the Egyptian Ambassador expressed gratitude for the coun-

try's care for the Egyptian Copts. The Pope also met with President Sheikh Khalifa and religious officials, and presented a speech praising the country's religious tolerance policy and its role in enhancing co-existence between different religions.

On April 23, 2007, the Director General of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments headed the monthly meeting with the Authority's preachers, in which he encouraged moderation in preaching and spreading tolerance among all Muslims.

On April 12 and 13, 2007, the Evangelical Church of Abu Dhabi held its annual retreat at the Abu Dhabi Ladies Club, a nonprofit organization headed by Sheikha Fatima, widow of the late President Sheikh Zayed.

On April 11, 2007, during a lecture at the Deputy Prime Minister's Information Office, the Romanian Ambassador praised the country's leading role in providing religious freedom.

On April 7, 2007, the Coptic church and the Evangelical Church of Abu Dhabi held their Easter celebration service. Church officials expressed their gratitude to the country's leaders for allowing tolerance and respect for other religions. On the same day tens of thousands of Christians attended the Easter Mass in the Holy Trinity Church compound in Dubai.

In April 2007 the Zayed House for Islamic Culture held a seminar on cultural diversity and civilized communication, as part of the country's call for religious tolerance.

In March 2007 delegations from the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee visited the country and met with senior Government officials to discuss religious tolerance. Both groups lauded the country for its moderate religious policy.

On February 27, 2007, during his visit to the country, the former Archbishop of Washington hailed the country's religious tolerance and the President's entrenchment of this policy.

On February 19, 2007, a religious dialogue attended by 130 Christian and Muslim students, was held at the University of Wollongong in Dubai. A pastor and an Islamic scholar presented lectures on interpretations and references to Jesus Christ in both Muslim and Christian holy books.

On February 9, 2007, the Archbishop of Canterbury lauded the President's encouragement of cultural and interfaith dialogue and the country's role in spreading tolerance and co-existence among different religions and civilizations.

On February 8, 2007, the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments held meetings with imams and preachers in all emirates, and discussed their evolving role in educating themselves and delivering messages of tolerance and moderation, and condemning extremist thoughts.

On February 8, 2007, the Latin Archbishop of Jerusalem, Jordan, and Cyprus, praised the country's leadership in spreading justice and tolerance values, and in enhancing peace and dialogue among nations.

On January 23, 2007, the Roman Catholic Bishop spoke about religious tolerance at the symposium "Khalifa and the Culture of Tolerance." The Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and Religious Advisor Ali Al-Heshimi spoke about tolerance as a second nature of the country's people and about the efforts of the country's leadership to promote peace and the spirit of dialogue among different religions.

On January 6, 2007, the Religious Advisor and other religious officials attended the Christmas celebrations of the Orthodox Coptic church. The Coptic pastor thanked the country's leadership for its religious tolerance.

On December 23, 2006, the Dawoodi Bohra Community's spiritual head arrived in the country for a 1-week stay, during which he gave a speech in Dubai to more than 10,000 community members from across the country, as part of Eid al-Adha celebrations. He also inaugurated a new mosque complex in Ajman and laid the foundation stone for an upscale community residential project in Al Ghusais.

In December 2006 the Deputy Ruler of Ras al-Khaimah donated a parcel of land for several Christian denominations, including a new Catholic church.

On November 26, 2006, the Ruler of Sharjah received the Anglican Bishop in Cyprus and the Gulf.

On October 1, 2006, as part of a series of presentations during the month of Ramadan, a renowned Islamic scholar gave a speech in Dubai on the characteristics of Islam, stating that Islam is moderate and balanced, and cannot be linked to terrorism and extremism because of the mistakes of some individuals.

The Anglican pastor in Abu Dhabi regularly attended open majlis with the Minister of Higher Education, Sheikh Nahyan, to confirm friendship and solidarity between the two faiths.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Non-Muslim religious leaders from inside and outside of the country regularly referred 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 regarded the country as a Muslim nation that should respect Muslim religious sensibilities on matters such as public consumption of alcohol, modest dress, and public comportment, UAE society also emphasized respect for privacy and Islamic traditions of tolerance, particularly with respect to forms of Christianity. Modest casual attire for men and women was permitted throughout the country.

Many hotels, stores, and other businesses patronized by both citizens and foreigners were permitted to sell alcohol and pork to non-Muslims and to acknowledge openly non-Muslim holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Diwali (although such displays generally are not permitted during the month of Ramadan). Shopping centers were festive during Christian holidays, and traditional holiday foods, decorations, posters, books, and videotapes were widely available. School children gathered in Dubai malls to sing Christmas carols while "department-store Santas" handed out gifts. Reports of religious holiday celebrations, including church services, were regularly printed in the media. The largest air carrier in the country, Emirates Airline, brought European tourists to Dubai on "Easter-special sightseeing packages."

Citizens occasionally expressed concern regarding the influence on their society of the cultures of the country's foreign majority. However, in general, citizens were familiar with foreign societies and believed that the best way to balance foreign influence was by supporting and strengthening indigenous cultural traditions.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

U.S. Embassy officials in Abu Dhabi and consulate general officials in Dubai discussed religious tolerance and freedom with Government officials on a number of occasions and encouraged the Government to increase religious freedom by permitting the opening or expansion of religious facilities for the large expatriate population.

Embassy officials met with the Director General of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments on a regular basis to discuss religious freedom and tolerance.

On May 2, 2007, Embassy officials and a State Department representative on Anti-Semitism visited the Director of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments to discuss the country's moderate policy and tolerance for all faiths.

Embassy and consulate officials also helped to protect religious freedom by monitoring its status through informal inquiries and meetings with Government officials and representatives of Muslim, Christian, and other religious groups.

YEMEN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, there were some restrictions. Muslims and followers of religious groups other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs, but the Government prohibits conversion from Islam and the proselytization of Muslims.

Although relations among religious groups continued to contribute to religious freedom, there were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. There were isolated attacks on Jews and some prominent Zaydi Muslims felt targeted by Government entities for their religious affiliation. Government military reengagement in the Saada governorate caused political, tribal, and religious tensions to reemerge in January 2007, following the third military

clash with rebels associated with the al-Houthi family, who adhere to the Zaydi school of Shi'a Islam.

The U.S. 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 328,100 square miles and a population of 20 million.

Virtually all citizens are Muslims, either belonging to the Zaydi order of Shi'a Islam or to the Shafa'i order of Sunni Islam. While there are no available statistics, estimates are that the Zaydis form 30–35 percent and the Shafa'is form 65–70 percent of the general population. There are a few thousand Ismaili Muslims who reside mainly in the north.

Jews are the only indigenous religious minority. Nearly all of the country's once-sizable Jewish population has emigrated. Fewer than 500 Jews remain in the northern part of the country, primarily in the vicinity of Raida and Saada; however, in January 2007, the historic Saada governorate community of 45 Jews was relocated to Sana'a, reportedly after being threatened by a follower of the al-Houthis, who ordered them to leave the governorate. Violence between Government forces and the al-Houthis flared in Saada shortly thereafter, causing the continuous internal displacement of Jews in northern Yemen and their eventual transfer to Sana'a. Since fleeing their homes, the 45 Jews have been under the protection and care of the Government.

There are 3,000 Christians throughout the country, most of whom are refugees or temporary foreign residents. There are 40 Hindus living in Aden who trace their origins to India. There are four churches in Aden, three Roman Catholic and one Anglican. Aden also has one Hindu temple. There were three known functioning synagogues in the north of the country; however, since the displacement of the Saada Jews earlier this year, this number may have changed.

Christian missionaries and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) affiliated with missionary groups operated in the country during the reporting period, and most restricted their activities to the provision of medical services; others were employed in teaching and social services. Invited by the Government, the Sisters of Charity ran homes for the poor and persons with disabilities in Sana'a, Taiz, Hodeida, and Aden. A Swedish mission organization ran a technical school for the disabled and poor in Taiz. There was also a medical mission in Saada, but in January 2007, the mission reportedly fled to escape the fighting. It is believed that they remained in the region to provide medical assistance to victims of the violence. Another mission operated two charitable clinics in Aden.

Among religious minorities, approximately 1,000 Christians and most Jews actively participated in some form of formal religious service or ritual, although not always in a public place of worship.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. Followers of religious groups other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs and to wear religiously distinctive ornaments or dress; however, Shari'a forbids conversion and prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing, and the Government enforces this prohibition. The Government requires permission for the construction of new places of worship and prohibits non-Muslims from holding elected office.

The Government issues residence visas to priests so that they may provide for their community's religious needs. Christian clergy, who ministered to the foreign community, were employed in teaching, social services, and health care.

The country maintains regular diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

The Government does not maintain records of an individual's religious identity, and there is no law that requires religious groups to register with the state; however, the General Election Committee has adopted a policy barring all non-Muslims from running for Parliament. Chapter 2, Article 106 of the Constitution further notes that the President of the Republic must "practice his Islamic duties."

Public schools provide instruction in Islam but not in other religions; however, Muslim citizens can attend private schools that do not teach Islam. Almost all non-Muslim students in the country are foreigners and attend private schools.

The Muslim holy days of Eid al-Adha, Muharram, and Eid al-Fitr are public holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, there were some restrictions.

During the reporting period, the Government engaged in efforts to ease religious tension between it and some members of the Zaydi-Shi'a establishment; however, public tension reemerged in January 2007, most notably in the media, as a result of Government action against the al-Houthi group's armed insurrection. The Government maintains that the al-Houthis are adherents of Twelver Shi'ism, a variant of Shi'ism which differs from that of the country's predominant Zaydi-Shi'a. The al-Houthis and the Shabab follow the teachings of the late rebel cleric Hussein Badr Eddine al-Houthi, who was killed during a 10-week rebellion that he led in June 2004 against the Government in Saada. Some Zaydis reported harassment and discrimination by the Government because they were suspected of sympathizing with the al-Houthis. However, it appears the Government's actions against the group were probably politically, not religiously, motivated.

Government actions to counter an increase in political violence in Saada restricted some practice of religion. In January 2007, for the third year, the Government banned the celebration of Ghadeer Day (a holiday celebrated by Shi'a Muslims) in parts of the Saada governorate. During the reporting period, the Government also reportedly intensified its efforts to stop the growth of the al-Houthis' popularity by limiting the hours that mosques were permitted to be open to the public. The Government closed down what it claimed to be extremist Shi'a religious institutes, reassigning imams who were thought to espouse radical doctrine, and increasing surveillance of mosque sermons. The Government abolished the Zaydi-affiliated al-Haq political party in March 2007, reportedly for not meeting political party law requirements. Many members of the party, however, believed the party was inappropriately dissolved because of its links to the al-Houthis and Shabab movement.

The Government prohibits the proselytization of Muslims. During the period covered by this report, there were reports of persons being temporarily detained for possession of religious materials with the intent to proselytize.

Under Shari'a, as applied in the country, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, which the Government interprets as a crime punishable by death. During the period covered by this report, there were no reported cases in which persons were charged with apostasy or prosecuted for it by Government authorities.

The Government did not allow the building of new public places of worship without previous authorization. Roman Catholic officials at the end of this reporting period, like last year, were still waiting for a decision from the Government on whether it would allow an officially recognized Roman Catholic establishment to be built in Sana'a. Church officials did not attribute Government inaction to discrimination.

Weekly services for Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians were held throughout Sana'a, Aden, and other cities without Government interference. Throughout the country, Christian and Jewish services were held regularly in private homes or facilities, such as schools, without harassment, and such facilities appeared adequate to accommodate the small numbers involved.

The ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and the Islah opposition party both drew on Islam as a basis for law in their platforms. The ruling GPC did not exclude members of any religion from its membership. Islah required that a member must be "committed" to Islamic teachings. There were other minor political parties that were said to be Islamic in nature, although it was not clear if they restricted their membership to Muslims.

During the reporting period, the Government continued its efforts to prevent the politicization of mosques and schools, and to curb extremism, and increase tolerance. The Government's efforts concentrated on monitoring mosques for sermons that incite violence or other political statements that it considered harmful to public security. Private Islamic organizations could maintain ties to international Islamic organizations; however, the Government sporadically monitored their activities through the police and intelligence authorities.

During the reporting period, the Government also continued efforts to close unlicensed schools and religious centers. By the end of the period covered by this report, more than 4,500 unlicensed religious schools and institutions were closed. The Government expressed concern that these schools deviated from formal educational requirements and promoted militant ideology. The Government also deported some foreign students found studying in unlicensed religious schools. The Government prohibited private and national schools from teaching courses outside of the offi-

cially approved curriculum. The purpose of these actions was to curb ideological and religious extremism in schools.

There were reports that both the Ministry of Culture and the Political Security Office (PSO) monitored and sometimes removed books that espoused Zaydi-Shi'a Islamic doctrine from store shelves after publication. There were also credible reports from Zaydi scholars and politicians that authorities banned the publishing of some materials that promoted Zaydi-Shi'a Islam. The Government denied that the media was subject to censorship by any security apparatus.

Government policy does not prohibit or provide punishment for the possession of non-Islamic religious literature; however, on occasion there were credible reports that persons were harassed by members of the PSO, an organization which reports directly to the president's office, and by police for possessing such literature. There were also reports that some members of the PSO monitored, harassed, and occasionally censored the mail of missionary groups and those associated with them, ostensibly to prevent proselytizing.

Following the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, owners of property expropriated by the Communist government of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen were invited to seek restitution of their property; however, implementation has been extremely limited, and very few properties have been returned to previous owners. In exchange for its confiscated property, the Catholic Church requested from the Government a small plot of land in Sana'a on which to build a Catholic establishment. The Church was awaiting action on the request at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Constitution declares that Islamic Shari'a is the source of all legislation. Some local customs, believed to be part of Shari'a as practiced in the country, are codified in various laws and policies. Some of these laws discriminate against women and persons of other religious groups.

According to the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, Muslim women are not permitted to marry outside of Islam. Under 1992 Personal Status Law No. 20, men are permitted to marry as many as four wives, although very few do so. The law also forbids men from marrying non-Muslims (except for Jews and Christians) or apostates (those who have renounced Islam).

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, security officials arbitrarily arrested and detained some individuals suspected of proselytizing. There was also a credible newspaper report that claimed security officials harassed and detained a Muslim carrying missionary publications in Taiz. Unconfirmed reports attributed such incidents to followers of conservative Salafi Islamic doctrine within the security apparatus.

Since 2001 the Government has detained several hundred Islamists who returned to Yemen from Afghanistan and/or Iraq "for questioning." Although most persons were released within days, some reportedly continued to be detained beyond the maximum detention period as terrorist or security suspects.

In May 2006 President Saleh pardoned two imams, Yahia Hussein al-Dailami, who was sentenced to death, and Muhammed Ahmad Miftah, who was sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment. The two were originally convicted of establishing contacts with Iran for the purpose of harming the country. The two men publicly opposed the Government's action in Saada and formed the Sana'a Youth Organization, a Zaydi religious-based group that supported the al-Houthis. Both men maintained that they only advocated peaceful dissent against Government action in Saada.

During the same month, the Government released more than 200 al-Houthi rebel detainees in an amnesty. It was unclear how many of those detained participated in the renewed March 2005 rebellion against the Government. Although some of those detained were held for their support of the al-Houthis' religious teachings, the arrests appeared to have been more politically than religiously motivated.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

As part of its campaign against religious extremism, the Government also took action to improve conditions that affected societal attitudes on religious freedom. In May 2006 the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Guidance conducted a 6-day training course for 500 imams to promote principles of moderation and religious tolerance. The Government continued to support this campaign and planed for similar programs in the future, under the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Guidance.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice, but a general sense of religious freedom persisted. Religious minorities generally lived in harmony with their Muslim neighbors.

Isolated attacks in recent years by anti-Jewish extremists have convinced most of the country's Jews to relocate to the town of Raida for safety and to sustain their community. The Saada Jewish community was displaced by fighting to Sana'a.

There were no reported incidents of violence or discrimination between the adherents of Zaydi and Shafa'i Islam, the two main orders of Islam practiced in the country.

Religiously motivated violence was neither incited nor tolerated by the Islamic clergy, except for a small, politically motivated clerical minority, often with ties to foreign extremist elements.

During the reporting period, there were sporadic reports of violence initiated by Salafi elements attempting to take control of moderate and Sufi mosques around the country. There were also unconfirmed reports that followers of Ismaili Islamic teachings were occasionally harassed and forbidden entry to mosques affiliated with Salafi followers.

SECTION IV. U.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 maintained an active dialogue on human rights concerns with the Government, NGOs, religious groups, journalists, human rights activists, and women's rights activists. Embassy officers periodically met with representatives of the Jewish and Christian communities.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

The Constitution proclaims that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law." However, it also states that Islam is the "religion of the state" and that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." The right to religious freedom was not respected in practice. Years of Taliban rule and weak democratic institutions have contributed to intolerance manifested in acts of harassment and violence against reform-minded Muslims and religious minorities.

Still recovering from 25 years of violence and suffering from an ongoing insurgency, the country is slowly moving toward greater stability and democracy. Since 2004, the country has held democratic presidential, parliamentary, and provincial council elections. In April 2006 President Hamid Karzai nominated a second Cabinet, and by the end of 2006, a Supreme Court. Efforts to reform the judiciary were underway with assistance from the U.S. and the international community. The Government took limited steps to increase religious freedom. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized some seminars for religious leaders to promote religious tolerance and moderate views versus strict interpretations of Shari'a on women's issues.

Despite reform efforts, there was an increase in the number of reports of problems involving religious freedom compared to previous years. Several high-profile cases involving religious freedom sparked demonstrations in major cities during the period covered by this report. Condemnations of conversions from Islam and censorship increased concerns about citizens' ability to freely practice minority religions.

The country's population is nearly entirely Muslim. Non-Muslim minority groups faced incidents of discrimination and persecution. Conversion is understood by many citizens to contravene the tenets of Islam and Shari'a. Due to societal pressure, most local Christians hid their religion from their neighbors and others. As a result, little information was available about this community or the challenges it faced. The local Sikh and Hindu populations, although allowed to practice publicly, continued to face problems obtaining land for cremation purposes and faced discrimination when seeking Government jobs as well as harassment during major celebrations. Within the Muslim population, relations among the different sects of Islam continued to be difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a community has faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. This discrimination continued to exist.

The U.S. Government regularly discusses religious freedom issues with Government officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to send political, civil society, and religious leaders to programs in the United States.

The Embassy also advocated for the Hindu and Sikh community in their efforts to obtain land for cremation. Land was assigned, and the Embassy continued to work to finalize the agreement, which as of the end of the reporting period, had still not been signed. Together with the international community, the U.S. Government expressed concern at the treatment of local converts to Christianity.

Some Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) provided assistance through the U.S. Military's Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) to build madrassahs, or religious schools, for local communities. During the reporting period, the U.S. military completed projects to repair, refurbish, or provide supplies and equipment to 35 mosques around the country.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 402,356 square miles and a population of 31 million. Reliable data on religious demography is not available because an official nationwide census has not been conducted in decades. Observers estimate that 80 percent

of the population is Sunni Muslim; 19 percent is Shi'a Muslim; and other religious groups make up less than 1 percent of the population. There is a small, hidden Christian community; there are no reliable figures on its size, but estimates range from 500 to 8,000. There are roughly 3,000 Sikh and Hindu believers and more than 400 Afghans who are followers of the Baha'i faith. In addition, there are small numbers of adherents of other religious groups, mostly Buddhist foreigners.

Traditionally, the dominant religion has been the sect of Sunni Islam that follows the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. For the last 200 years, Sunnis often have looked to the example of the Darul Uloom madrassah located in Deoband near Delhi, India. The Deobandi school has long sought to purify Islam by discarding supposedly un-Islamic accretions to the faith and reemphasizing the models that it believes were established in the Qur'an and the customary practices of Muhammad. Additionally, Deobandi scholars often have opposed what they perceive as Western influences. Much of the population in Afghanistan adhered to Deobandi-influenced Hanafi Sunnism, but a sizable minority adhered to a more mystical version of Islam, generally known as Sufism. Sufism centers on orders or brotherhoods that follow charismatic religious leaders.

Members of the same religious group have traditionally concentrated in certain regions. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns centered around the city of Kandahar and dominated the south and east of the country. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras was in the Hazarajat, the mountainous central highlands around Bamyan. Northeastern provinces traditionally have had Ismaili populations. Other areas, including Kabul, the capital, were more heterogeneous and included large Sunni, Shi'a, Hindu, Sikh and Baha'i populations. Similarly, the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif included 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 emigrated during the years of civil war and Taliban rule. Even at their peak, these non-Muslim minorities constituted less than 1 percent of the population. Most of the small Hindu and Sikh populations, which once numbered approximately 50,000 persons, took refuge abroad during the many years of conflict; however, there is a small population of native-Afghan Hindus and Sikhs that never left. In total, non-Muslims, including Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is and Jews, were estimated to number in the hundreds at the end of Taliban rule. Since the fall of the Taliban a number of religious minorities have returned.

During the reporting period, there were approximately 3,000 Sikhs and Hindus living in the country. There are seven gurdwaras, Sikh places of worship, in Kabul, where worshippers generally were free to visit, and few threats were reported. The Hindu population, which is less distinguishable than the Sikh population whose men wear a particular headdress, faced little harassment. There were approximately six Hindu temples in four cities. An additional 18 were destroyed during the many years of war. There is one Christian church and one synagogue. Some who converted to Christianity as refugees have returned. Others may have been born abroad into other religious groups. The Baha'i faith has had followers in Afghanistan for approximately 150 years. The community is predominantly based in Kabul, where more than 300 Baha'i members live, but another 100 are said to live in other parts of Afghanistan.

There were some missionary groups working in the country. While proselytizing was not technically illegal, those that actively proselytized did so in secret to avoid harassment or arrest by local officials.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Efforts continued to update the existing criminal and civil legal codes to bring them in line with the country's international treaty obligations. Full and effective enforcement of the Constitution is an ongoing challenge due to the lack of a strong tradition of reliance on state judicial institutions.

The Constitution was ratified in January 2004. The Constitution declares Islam to be the official "religion of the state," stating that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam," and that, "the provisions of adherence to the fundamentals of the sacred religion of Islam and the regime of the Islamic Republic cannot be amended." Followers of other religions are "free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of the law."

Interpretation of the Constitution on matters of religion has proved difficult, as the Constitution also includes the mandate to abide by the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights and obliges the state to "create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, protection of human dignity, protection of human rights, realization of democracy, and to ensure national unity and equality among all ethnic groups and tribes." For issues on which the Constitution and penal code are silent (such as conversion and blasphemy), the courts defer to Shari'a law—interpretations of which often come into conflict with the mandate to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Societal disputes are often resolved by informal judicial committees, "shuras," comprised of tribal and religious leaders often with no formal legal training based on interpretations of Shari'a law. Some estimates suggested that 80 percent of all civil and criminal cases went through shuras. This left many vulnerable to violation of their legal rights, as customary shuras or "jirgas" did not adhere to the constitutional rights of citizens and often violated the rights of religious minorities.

Article 34 of the Constitution protects freedom of expression and of the press. Amendments to the Afghan Mass Media Law, approved by the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament on May 22, 2007, included both positive and negative changes with respect to religious freedom. In the current version of the draft law, which still has to be approved by the Upper House and signed by President Karzai, Article 45(1) prohibits the publication by the mass media of any materials that are contrary to the "principles and provisions" of the Islamic Religion, and Article 45(2) prohibits the publication by the mass media of materials that are offensive to other religions. Article 45(6) states that the mass media shall be prohibited from printing, airing, broadcasting, or otherwise disseminating materials (articles, programs, etc.) that publicize or promote any religion other than Islam. This formalizes in Afghanistan's written law a prohibition on the use of mass media to attempt to convert others to religions (other than Islam). Regardless, any attempt to convert a Muslim to another religion is already illegal in Afghanistan under Islamic law, whether through the mass media or otherwise.

The ambiguity surrounding what constitutes offensive material offers the potential for abuse of this clause to restrict press freedom and intimidate journalists. These rules also apply to non-Muslims and foreign-owned media outlets.

The amended Media Law instructs *National Radio and Television Afghanistan*, the state-run media outlet, to provide balanced broadcasting that respects the culture, language, and religious beliefs of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

In May 2007 the Upper House of Parliament passed a draft resolution on reconciliation. The resolution must go to the Lower House and be signed by President Karzai before becoming law. One of the clauses calls for the "censoring and prevention of broadcast of commonplace films and TV programs that are aimed against the ideology, customs, and Afghan culture, and which cause damage to the feelings of our people." The draft resolution also called for, "more Islamic religious programs on TV, which is expected to be effective in bringing the people and Government close to each other." It also calls for the Afghan Government to enroll Afghan Taliban who are studying religious subjects in Pakistani madrassas into Afghan madrassas, presumably as an attempt to dissuade them from fundamentalist religious beliefs that advocate attacks against the Afghan Government.

Proselytism was practiced discreetly. There are no laws forbidding the practice, even though it is viewed by authorities and society as contrary to the beliefs of Islam. There were unconfirmed reports of attempts to arrest Afghan Christians involved in proselytism. Foreigners caught proselytizing were deported. The Government worked on revising the penal code to bring it in line with international standards during the reporting period. Blasphemy is a capital crime, and authorities could punish blasphemy with death, if committed by a male over age 18 or a female over age 16, who is of sound mind. Those accused of blasphemy are given 3 days to recant their actions and could otherwise face death by hanging.

Conversion from Islam is considered apostasy and is punishable by death under some interpretations of Shari'a. As in the case of blasphemy, an Afghan citizen who has converted from Islam (if a male over age 18 or a female over age 16, who is of sound mind) has 3 days to recant his or her conversion and is otherwise subject to death by hanging.

In May 2007 the General Directorate of Fatwas and Accounts under the Supreme Court issued a ruling on the status of the Baha'i faith, declaring it to be distinct from Islam and a form of blasphemy. The ruling also declared all Muslims who convert to Baha'i to be apostates and all followers of the Baha'i faith to be infidels. The text of the ruling reads, "Islamic scholars have issued a fatwa [religious announcement] against the Baha'i faith, declaring it to be separate from the religion of Islam and a form of blasphemy. If any Muslim follows the Baha'i faith, he is considered an apostate. In consideration of the themes written in the books *The Baha'i Religion* and *The Kingdom of Heaven's Message*—the famous books of the Baha'i religion—

the Islamic scholars of the Fatwa Directorate of the Supreme Court have issued a fatwa declaring Bab Mirza Mohammad Ali and Baha'i Mirza Hussein Ali (founders of the Baha'i faith who have claimed to be Mehdi or Imam Zaman of the last days and messengers of God) and their followers to be apostates. This ruling is supported by writings from other Islamic scholars, which have declared Bab Mirza Mohammad Ali and Baha'i Mirza Hussein Ali and their followers to be apostates."

The ruling appears to have resulted from an Ulama Council's investigation into where the Baha'i faith stands vis-à-vis Islam. The Ulama Council that issued the ruling deemed that the Baha'i faith and its followers would be treated similarly to Christians and Jews in the country. While the ruling is unlikely to affect foreign-national Baha'is in Afghanistan, it could potentially create problems for the country's small Afghan Baha'i population, particularly on the question of marriage. Many Afghan Baha'is are married to Afghan Muslims, but the ruling could be used by courts to invalidate marriages between Baha'is and Muslims. This would create a noteworthy distinction between how the courts view the Baha'i faith vis-à-vis Christianity and Judaism, as Jewish and Christian women (but not Baha'i women) can be legally married to Muslim men. (Muslim women can only be married to Muslim men.) Afghan citizens who convert from Islam to the Baha'i faith face a risk of persecution, similar to that of Christian converts. It remains to be seen how the Government will treat second-generation Baha'is who technically have not converted, as they were born into families of Baha'i followers, but may still be viewed as having committed blasphemy.

Prior to the drafting of the Constitution, some conservative elements advocated that the Constitution should favor the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence associated with the Sunnis over the Jafari school used by the Shi'as. These elements also called for the primacy of Shari'a in the legal system; however, the Constitution does not grant preferential status to the Hanafi school, nor does it make specific reference to Shari'a. The Constitution also grants that Shi'a law would be applied in cases dealing with personal matters involving Shi'as; there is no separate law applying to non-Muslims.

The Constitution requires that the President and Vice President be Muslim and does not distinguish in this respect between Sunnis and Shi'as. This requirement is not explicitly applied to Government ministers, but the oath required of ministers suggests adherence to the Islamic faith. The Constitution has no religious requirement for Members of Parliament.

The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) conducted national consultations on transitional justice, promoted reconciliation at civil society gatherings, and through various media, continued to receive reports of abuses from citizens. In December 2005 President Karzai approved a Transitional Justice Action Plan which was adopted by the cabinet by the end of the year. In 2003 the Ministry of Interior established a Human Rights Department to investigate abuses, and this department designated two officers responsible for human rights compliance in each province. During the reporting period, all provincial police departments had human rights officers to investigate abuses.

In August 2006 the Government announced it was considering establishing a Department for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue within the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Under the Taliban an entity with the same name was a much feared organization known for its extensive abuse of women and religious minorities. The proposal to establish a Vice and Virtue Department would require a presidential decree, and at the end of the reporting period, it rested in the President's office.

The Minister of Hajj and Endowment stated that the proposed Department's mandate would be similar to that of parallel ministries in other Islamic countries—to educate people in order to discourage actions inconsistent with Islamic principles—rather than the mandate observed under the Taliban.

A de facto local "morals and rules commission" was established in Khost Province during Ramadan (September–October 2006). It arrested individuals for selling alcohol to Muslims, possessing and selling pornography, and displaying "other improper ethics." Minister Shahrani, the Minister of Hajj and Endowment, stated that this local Vice and Virtue Department was not connected to the Ministry in Kabul. Khost Governor Jamal stated that the commission was temporary, with a limited mandate during Ramadan to enforce existing laws.

Chapter 18 of the Penal Code of 1976 (Penal Code) addresses "Crimes Against Religions," although it does not address blasphemous remarks. Article 347 of the Penal Code says that (a) people who forcefully stop the conduct or rites of religious rituals and (b) people who destroy or damage permitted places of worship where religious rituals are conducted or who destroy or damage any sign or symbol of any religion, shall be subject to a medium-term prison sentence and/or a cash fine of between

12,000 and 60,000 Afghanis ($240–$1200). There is nothing in the Penal Code related to the spoken or written utterance of insults or profanity against God, or religion or sacred symbols, books, etc.

Only Islamic holy days are celebrated as public holidays. There were no reports that Muslim holidays negatively affected other religious groups. The Shi'a community openly celebrated the birthday of Imam Ali, one of the most revered figures in the Shi'a tradition. In past years, the Shi'a holiday of Ashura, during which Shi'a Muslims hold religious parades in local streets, has triggered violence in the cities of Kabul and Herat. However, observations of Ashura in January 2007 were overwhelmingly peaceful.

The licensing and registration of religious groups is not required.

Both Sunnis and Shi'as were permitted to go on the Hajj, and there was no quota system for those from either group. Participants were selected by lottery.

The components of the educational system that survived more than 25 years of war place considerable emphasis on religion. The Constitution states that, "The state shall devise and implement a unified educational curriculum based on the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam, national culture, and in accordance with academic principles, and develops the curriculum of religious subjects on the basis of the Islamic sects existing in Afghanistan." During the reporting period, the public school curriculum included Islamic content but no content from other religious groups.

The Government announced in April 2007 that it would begin setting up its own madrassahs in order to counter the influence of extremist elements operating in the countryside. The Ministry of Education considers it the Government's responsibility to offer a tolerant and modern Islamic education for young Afghans, as many parents want religious schooling for their children. These schools plan to offer an alternative to the Taliban's use of education as a weapon of terrorism. The first schools are scheduled to be established during the spring and summer of 2007, with a new madrassah to eventually open in each of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The planned schools will accommodate up to 50,000 children, and offer 40 percent religious education, 40 percent general education, and 20 percent computer science and foreign languages.

There was no restriction on parental religious teaching. The national curriculum and textbooks that emphasize moderate Islamic terms and principles steadily replaced the preaching of jihad in schools. By the end of the period covered by this report, all schools in Kabul and in 15 of the 34 provinces, mostly surrounding the capital, were using the new texts. The Ministry of Education began introducing human rights as a subject in the national school curriculum at the beginning of the school year in 2003 and extended it nationwide in 2004.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There was no information available concerning restrictions on the general training of clergy. The Government paid officially registered mullahs, but only a small number of the country's active mullahs are registered, as the Government's registration program is a new initiative.

As discussed above, under Islamic law, conversion from Islam is punishable by death.

Immigrants and non-citizens were free to practice their own religions. In Kabul 200 to 300 expatriates met regularly at Christian worship services held in private locations due to the existence of only one Christian church in the country. This church, located within the diplomatic enclave, was not open to local nationals. Buddhist foreigners were free to practice in temples established for the Buddhist immigrant community.

Since the fall of the Taliban, no political parties (other than the Taliban) have been officially banned for religious reasons. The Constitution allows for political parties provided that "the program and charter of the party are not contrary to the principles of sacred religion of Islam." Political parties based on ethnicity, language, Islamic school of thought, and religion are not allowed.

There were an unknown number of foreign missionaries in the country who worked discreetly to avoid harassment. There were no overt foreign missionaries or other non-Islamic religiously oriented organizations in the country. Proselytism was practiced discreetly, since it is viewed as contrary to the beliefs of Islam. During the period covered by this report, there were a few minor incidents involving individuals attempting to proselytize.

There were reports of local government officials prohibiting music, movies, and television on religious grounds. The cable television audience in urban centers continued to expand, and unlike in previous years, televisions, radios, and other electronic goods were sold freely, and music was played widely. Kabul continued to have

five radio stations, including the official Radio Kabul. Private media outlets were publicly criticized by Government officials for broadcasting material that was "un-Islamic" such as footage of women dancing in music videos or live musical performances; however, Bollywood soap operas, which show women with their heads uncovered, remain the most popular programs on TV. The most recent result of this public debate on appropriate material for TV programming was the Media Law, discussed above, which included a significant increase in language mandating that media activity must be in accordance with the principals of Islam.

Nongovernmental radio stations broadcast a mix of Afghan, Indian, Pakistani, and Western music. Approximately 90 percent of the country's inhabitants reported some access to radio. The stations had no religious content other than brief prayers and Qur'an readings on the Government-controlled radio station.

The Government does not designate religion on national identity cards and does not require individuals to declare a belief in Islam in order to receive citizenship. However, the state, including the courts, traditionally considers all citizens to be Muslim; therefore, some basic citizenship rights of non-Muslims were not respected.

The Government provided limited funding or assistance for Sikh schools. The Sikh community chose to send its children to its own schools because of reported abuse and harassment in Government-run schools. In July 2007 the Ministry of Education opened a school for Sikh and Hindu children in Ghazni province. A Sikh school in Kabul has been privately run with no assistance from the Government for several years and reported having only one full-time teacher for 120 students. There were no Christian or Jewish schools in the country.

The Government provides free electricity to the country's mosques. The Sikh and Hindu community are lobbying the Government to provide free electricity to their temples and gurdwaras as well.

In family disputes, courts continue to rely on a civil code that is based on the Sunni Hanafi school, regardless of whether the parties involved are Shi'a or Sunni. The civil code also applies to non-Muslims. In response to questions about marriage, the chief judge of the family court issued guidelines in accordance with the court's interpretation of Shari'a law. Most restrictive is the rule on marriage between non-Muslims, which stipulates that whether born in the country or elsewhere non-Muslims do not have the right to marry. According to Government officials, the court nevertheless considers all citizens to be Muslims by default and therefore non-Muslim Afghans can be married as long as they do not publicly acknowledge their non-Muslim beliefs. In addition, the judges stated that a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman, but if she is not "of the book," including Christian or Jewish, she must first convert. A Muslim woman, however, is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim man.

While there is currently one Hindu member of the Upper House of Parliament, he was appointed directly by President Karzai. The Hindu and Sikh communities have been lobbying to have one seat each designated for a Hindu and a Sikh representative in Parliament. They point out that ten seats have been reserved for ethnic minorities from the Kuchi community, and that their community should also have reserved representation. Members of the Hindu and Sikh communities report being discriminated against when seeking jobs with the local and national Government.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials occurred.

On April 9, 2007, police arrested an Afghan citizen who was born a member of the Baha'i faith, after his religious beliefs were exposed to authorities by his wife. After inquiries from the international community, authorities released the man on May 11, 2007. He had spent 31 days in jail without any charges. According to the Penal Code, authorities can jail a person for only up to 15 days without charges. Should authorities need more time to investigate a case, the courts may grant an extension of up to 15 days more. In this particular case, however, no such extension was requested or granted. Upon his release from jail, the man fled to another country along with other family members, one of whom feared police would try to detain him for his role in helping to seek the man's release from jail. The man's wife, who is Muslim, is seeking a divorce based on grounds that marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man is not legal in Afghanistan.

The March 2006 case of Abdul Rahman, an Afghan citizen who converted to Christianity, highlighted the extreme cultural sensitivities surrounding religious freedom in Afghanistan. As conversion is not prohibited by the Afghan Constitution or penal code, the Afghan legal system defers to Shari'a law—conservative interpretations of which deem conversion to be punishable by death. Rahman was detained in March 2006 for professing his conversion to Christianity and refusing to recant

it. He was eventually released based on findings of mental instability and granted asylum in Italy. However, the issue ignited a passionate debate throughout the country. Conservative religious clerics organized a demonstration of more than 700 protestors in Mazar-e-Sharif calling for Rahman's death and denouncing international involvement in the case. The Afghan Parliament objected to the fact that Rahman was whisked out of the country before standing trial and harshly criticized the international community's role in what it characterized as an internal matter.

According to a September 11, 2006, report by the U.N. Secretary General, following the highly publicized case of Abdul Rahman in March 2006, there have been three similar cases of harassment of Afghan Christians. In two of the cases, Afghan families in which some members had converted to Christianity reported being harassed in their community and eventually decided to leave the country. In a third case, a Christian convert was jailed on unrelated allegations of homicide. While in jail, another inmate who came to know of his religious beliefs killed him.

In August 2006, more than 1,000 members of a South Korean Christian aid group tried to organize a 3-day peace festival in several cities around Afghanistan. Many were expelled from the country after Islamic clerics accused them of trying to convert Muslims to Christianity. Officials in Kabul reported that the South Korean Christians who arrived for the peace festival were warned not to "preach religion." But the officials stated some group members ignored the warnings and were seen trying to convert Muslims. Group members who subsequently arrived at Kabul Airport were refused entry visas and turned back by customs officials. Those already in Kabul were confined to their guest houses. Under the terms of their tourist visas, local officials allowed them to leave the guest houses only in small groups to get food and supplies. Afghan authorities eventually expelled the remaining members from Afghanistan because their safety could not be guaranteed. The Government of Afghanistan maintains that its restrictions on the group were an effort to protect their safety and in response to a fear that their peace festival would have provoked societal violence throughout the country.

In October 2005 Ali Mohaqiq Nasab, a journalist and editor of a women's rights magazine, was sentenced to 2 years in prison by a tribunal for blasphemy for reprinting and commenting on two articles which questioned the harsh punishment imposed on women accused of adultery and theft under traditional Islamic law. He also advocated that conversion from Islam should not be considered a crime. After being tried in court, his sentence was reduced to 6 months on appeal. Half of this time was suspended, and Nasab was released in December 2005.

In May 2005 two students were suspended for a year from Herat University for commenting on Islam during a religious debate in ways that classmates and a teacher found blasphemous. The AIHRC reported that the two students were reinstated at the university and all charges against them suspended. Following the arrests, the students were released from jail and housed, for security purposes, at various safe houses.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no confirmed 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. However, the Hindu community reported that in late 2006, two Hindu women were abducted and their families were told the women had converted to Islam and chosen to marry Muslim men. The families were not allowed contact with the girls to confirm the story, and believe that if true, the women were forced to convert and marry.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were reported abuses targeted at specific religious groups by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report. Terrorist organizations attacked, and in some cases killed, several Muslim clerics for supporting the Government or for stating that activities conducted by terrorist organizations were against the tenets of Islam. There were also attacks on both Muslim and non-Muslim employees of international organizations, but it is unclear whether these attacks were politically or religiously motivated.

Attacks by al-Qaeda and Taliban networks continued during the reporting period. In a repeat of previous years, several killings of religious leaders and attacks on mosques were attributed to al-Qaeda and Taliban members who objected to their victims' links with the Karzai administration and to their particular interpretations of Islam. Throughout 2006, antigovernment elements killed more than a dozen clerics in Kandahar and 20 nationwide. These attacks also injured 40 other religious officials. In September 2006, a suicide bomber detonated himself outside a mosque

in Kandahar. These attacks were perceived by the public to be an attack on the Government and not on Islam.

Throughout 2006, numerous schools were attacked. While some claim schools allegedly connected with Christian groups were targeted by the Taliban, most schools attacked did not have an overt religious affiliation and were attended predominantly by Muslim children. Political motivations appeared to be the primary impetus behind these attacks. By early 2007 the number of school attacks began to decrease significantly, as insurgents realized such attacks lead to waning support from the Afghan public.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to stress reconciliation and cooperation among all citizens. Although it primarily was concerned with reconciliation of former Taliban combatants, it also expressed concern about religious intolerance. The Government responded positively to international approaches on human rights, including religious freedom, and worked effectively. The Government continued to indirectly emphasize ethnic and intrafaith reconciliation through the support of the judicial, constitutional, and human rights commissions composed of members of different ethnic and Muslim religious (Sunni and Shi'a) groups. The Constitutional Commission also included a Hindu member to represent non-Muslim religious minorities. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Hajj also worked together to give women the opportunity to attend mosques. While women have always had the right to attend mosques, separate areas had to be designated for them. The new initiative provided for such spaces in larger mosques where room was available. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized seminars for religious leaders to promote moderate views about the role of women in Islam. Approximately 20 religious leaders attended the seminars, which sparked continued discussion on the topic.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Relations between the different branches of Islam continued to be difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the Sunni population. However, since Shi'a representation has increased in Government, there was a decrease in hostility from Sunnis. Most Shi'a were 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. The Hazaras accused the Afghan Government, led by a Pashtun President, of providing preferential treatment to Pashtuns and of ignoring minorities, especially Hazaras. Hazaras have reported being asked to pay additional bribes at Afghan border crossings where Pashtuns were allowed to pass freely. These conflicts often have had economic and political roots but also have religious dimensions. The Government has made some public overtures to quell historical tensions affecting the Hazara community. In January 2007 it banned the Bollywood film *Kabul Express*, in which actors spoke several lines that were offensive to Afghanistan's Hazara community, characterizing the film as "anti-Afghan."

The treatment of the Shi'a community varied by locality. Although some discrimination continued at the local level, Shi'a generally were free to participate fully in public life. The rigid policies adopted both by the Taliban and by certain opposition groups adversely affected adherents of other branches of Islam and other religious groups. The active persecution of the Shi'a minority, including Ismailis, which existed under the Taliban regime has ended.

According to a recent UNHCR report, while Ismailis were not generally targeted or seriously discriminated against, they continued to be exposed to risks. In years past, local commanders in Baghlan province occupied or confiscated and then sold Ismaili land, and Ismailis were unable to reclaim their property. The Baghlan provincial court and other provincial authorities refused to dispense justice for Ismailis in land-related cases. Ismailis faced illegal taxation and extortion by local commanders. In Tala-wa-Barfak District, cases of rape of Ismaili women have been reported, with perpetrators acting with impunity.

According to the AIHRC, during the reporting period an Ismaili woman willingly married a follower of Hanafi Islam in a small village in Badakhshan province. While the bride's immediate family approved of the marriage, extended family and other villagers in the predominantly Ismaili region did not approve and eventually ousted the couple from the area.

Non-Muslim minorities such as Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians continued to face social discrimination and harassment and, in some cases, violence. This treatment

was not systematic, but the Government did little to improve conditions during this reporting period. For example, in the spring of 2006, there was an explosion outside of a Sikh gurdwara in Jalalabad.

In May 2007 the Sikh-Hindu community alleged that it was still working with the Kabul Municipality to resolve land titling problems. The community claims land rights to an area of Kabul that once held a large Sikh-Hindu community; however, the Government claims this land is owned by the Government and that no one has residential privileges there.

Some Sikh and Hindu children were unable to attend Government schools due to harassment from teachers and students. The Government took limited steps to protect these children and reintegrate them into the classroom environment. For example, during the reporting period, the Government opened the first-ever Government-sponsored school for Sikh and Hindu children in Ghazni. The AIHRC reported that members of the Hindu community in Kandahar City reported discrimination in schools and asked the local government to build a separate school for Sikh and Hindu children. This request was not met. There were no reports of discrimination toward Christians in schools.

After the fall of the Taliban, there continued to be episodic reports of persons at the local level using coercion to enforce social and religious conformity. During the reporting period, moderates in the Government opposed attempts by conservative elements to enforce rules regarding social and religious practices based on their interpretation of Islamic law.

When in public, most women in rural areas wear a garment called a burqa, which covers their full body and face, including the eyes, when in public. Since the fall of the Taliban, many women in urban areas no longer wear the burqa, however, a majority continued to wear some form of head covering either by choice or community pressure. Urban women generally did not wear burqas before the Taliban imposed this practice.

In contrast to previous years, there were no new reported cases of forced chastity examinations. However, local marriage traditions in which a newly-wed couple consummates their marriage on a white handkerchief which is later displayed as proof of the bride's virginity until marriage remain popular throughout the country. Women run the risk of immediate divorce and social ostracism, severe punishment from her in-laws, or death, if her virginity is not confirmed through this ritual. There were no reports of examinations directed at non-Muslims. Local religious officials also confronted women over their attire and behavior.

In recent years, some mullahs—particularly those from the southeastern provinces—have declined to participate in USG visitors programs for fear of retribution by insurgents upon their return to Afghanistan.

Muslim clerics with political connections were also the target of violence.

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.

U.S. representatives met regularly with Government officials and with religious and minority figures in an ongoing dialogue regarding the political, legal, religious, and human rights context of the country's reconstruction. The United States worked with civil society organizations to promote religious tolerance.

The U.S. Embassy actively promoted professional and cultural ties between local citizens and the United States. The public affairs section coordinated a variety of exchange, speaker, artistic, and information programs to generate an exchange of ideas between Americans and local citizens on democracy and civil society, human rights, Islam in America, and other subjects. The United States funded travel by local journalists, academics, politicians, government officials, religious scholars, community leaders, women, youth, and NGO officials to engage with their counterparts in the United States.

The U.S. Embassy continued to send local mullahs to the United States to participate in programs on democracy, civil society and Islam in America. Since 2003, the U.S. Government funded visits to the United States for approximately 50 mullahs under a program on "Democracy and Civil Society." The approximate cost of this program was $250,000 (12,575,000 Afghani). In July 2006 Afghan religious leaders attended a seminar in the U.S. on "The Role of Religious Leaders in a Democracy" sponsored by the U.S. Government.

In total, the U.S. military provided assistance to rehabilitate and equip 35 mosques during the period covered by this report.

U.S. Government officials supported efforts during the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga to include specific language in the draft Constitution to provide for equal rights for men and women and to incorporate moderate language on Islam.

The U.S. Government has also worked with civil society organizations to promote religious tolerance. During the reporting period, the U.S. Government provided funding for radio programming and training of community leaders on the theme of "Human Rights and Women's Rights in the Context of Islam" that is developed and implemented by Equal Access. To date, more than 200 community leaders have been trained.

BANGLADESH

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate, subject to law, public order, and morality, the religion of one's choice. It also states that every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain, and manage its religious institutions. While the Government publicly supported freedom of religion, attacks on religious and ethnic minorities continued to be a problem. Protests demanding that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims and instances of harassment continued sporadically, but the Government generally acted in an effective manner to protect Ahmadis and their property. Religion exerted a significant influence on politics, and the Government was sensitive to the Islamic consciousness of its political allies and the majority of its citizens.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. Citizens were generally free to practice the religion of their choice; however, Government officials, including the police, were often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minority victims of harassment and violence. The Government and many civil society leaders stated that violence against religious minorities normally had political or economic motivations and could not be attributed only to religion.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report. Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination and sometimes violence by the Muslim majority. Harassment of Ahmadis continued along with protests demanding that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims.

In October 2006, the national Government, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in a coalition with Islamist parties Jamaat Islami and Islami Okiyya Jote, stepped down from power in favor of a constitutionally-mandated caretaker Government charged with preparing the country for national elections in January 2007. However, in January 2007, President Iajuddin Ahmed announced a state of emergency to pre-empt widespread fears of a violent, one-sided election, and the next day, a new, nonpartisan caretaker Government was sworn into office. Of the 10 advisers or ministers in the new Government, one is Christian. In the 300-seat Parliament that was dissolved in October 2006, religious minorities held eight seats.

During the 2001 national election campaign period, the acute animosity between the two mainstream political parties led to numerous acts of significant violence against religious minorities. By the end of the reporting period, there were no significant reports of violence against minority members involving political party activists.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In meetings with officials and in public statements, officers at the U.S. Embassy encouraged the Government to protect the rights of minorities. Publicly and privately, the Embassy denounced acts of religious intolerance and called on the Government to ensure due process for all citizens. Early in 2006, the Embassy urged senior leaders of both parties to prevent such acts of violence in the upcoming political campaign, and met with members of the Hindu community to underscore Embassy concern and strengthen lines of communication in the event of future problems. The Ambassador made several visits to minority religious communities around the country. In April 2007, she visited the Roman Catholic mission in Madhupur to meet with the Garo community after the death of one of their leaders at the hands of the military. For the second year in a row, the U.S. Government sponsored the successful visit of a prominent U.S. Muslim cleric who spoke to audiences about Qur'anic interpretations that support tolerance and gender equity.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,126 square miles, and its population is 150 million. Sunni Muslims constitute 88 percent of the population. Approximately 10 percent of the population is Hindu. The remainder is mainly Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist. Ethnic and religious minority communities often overlap and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern regions. Buddhists are found predominantly among the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Bengali and ethnic minority Christians could be found in many communities across the country; in cities such as Barisal City, Gournadi (Barisal), Baniarchar in Gopalganj, Monipuripara in Dhaka, Christianpara in Mohakhali (Dhaka), Nagori in Gazipur. There also are small populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, Animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their numbers varied from a few thousand to 100,000 adherents for each religious group. There is no indigenous Jewish community, nor a significant immigrant Jewish population in the country.

Religion is an important part of community identity for citizens, including those who did not participate actively in prayers or services. A national survey in late 2003 confirmed that religion was the first choice by a citizen for self-identification; atheism was extremely rare.

The majority of individuals classified as foreign residents are returned Bangladeshi emigres. There are approximately 30,000 Rohingyan refugees, who practice Islam. There is no reliable estimate of the number of missionaries. Several faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operated in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to practice, profess, and propagate, subject to law, public order, and morality, the religion of one's choice. While the Government publicly supports freedom of religion, attacks on religious and ethnic minorities continued to be a problem.

While the right to propagate the religion of one's choice is guaranteed by the Constitution, local authorities and communities often objected to efforts to convert persons from Islam.

In general, Government institutions and the courts protect religious freedom. The Government ran imam training academies and proclaimed Islamic days of festivals but did not dictate sermon content, select or pay clergy, or monitor content of religious education in madrassahs.

Shari'a (Islamic law) was not implemented formally and was not imposed on non-Muslims, but played an influential role in civil matters pertaining to the Muslim community. For instance, alternative dispute resolution was available to individuals for settling family disputes and other civil matters not related to land ownership. The arbitrator may rely on principles found in Shari'a for settling disputes, if both parties agree to the settlement. In addition, Muslim family law was loosely based on Shari'a.

In 2001, the high court ruled all fatwas, legal rulings based on Shari'a, illegal. In deeming all fatwas illegal, the high court intended to end the extrajudicial punishments and restrictions forced on local populations by religious leaders. However, the high court's prohibition also included pronouncements on purely religious matters such as the dates of festivals or the religious validity of marriage or divorce. Several weeks later, after an appeal was filed by a group of Islamic clerics, the appellate court stayed the high court's ruling, stating that while the appeal was pending, the ban on fatwas could not be implemented. It was unclear when the appeal was expected to be considered.

While Islamic tradition dictates that only muftis (religious scholars) who have expertise in Islamic law are authorized to declare a fatwa, village religious leaders sometimes made declarations in individual cases and called the declaration a fatwa. Sometimes this resulted in extrajudicial punishments, often against women, for their perceived moral transgressions.

Family laws concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption differed slightly depending on the religion of the persons involved. Each religion had its own set of family laws. Muslim men may marry up to four wives; however, a Muslim man must get his first wife's signed permission before taking an additional wife. In contrast, Christian men may only marry one woman. Under Hindu law, unlimited polygamy is permitted and while there is no provision for divorce and legal separation, Hindu widows may legally remarry. There were no legal restrictions on marriage between members of different religious groups.

Religion exerted a powerful influence on politics, and the Government was sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of its political allies, the Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote, as well as the majority of its citizens.

In December 2006, the Awami League upset many of its minority and liberal supporters when it signed an electoral pact with the Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, a splinter Islamist group tied to violent Islamist militants. The agreement committed a future Awami League-led Government to recognizing some fatwas and an official declaration that the Prophet Mohammad is the last prophet, a direct challenge to the Ahmadiyya community. Ahmadis and liberal Bangladeshis criticized the agreement as politically expedient and inconsistent with core party principles. Following this criticism and open rebellion among senior party leaders, the Awami League quietly allowed the agreement to lapse after imposition of the state of emergency.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs administered three funds for religious and cultural activities: the Islamic Foundation, the Hindu Welfare Trust, and the Buddhist Welfare Trust. According to the Government, the Christian community did not want Government involvement in its religious affairs and requested that there not be any similar organization for their community; however, the Government told Christian leaders it would soon establish a welfare trust for Christians. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Hindu Welfare Trust had a fund of approximately $1.7 million (120 million taka) in savings. Over the year, it received approximately $30,000 (2 million taka) from the Government. The trust, founded in the 1980s, used its money to repair temples, modify cremation pyres, and help destitute Hindu families afford medical treatment. In addition, approximately $30,000 (2 million taka) went towards annual Puja celebrations.

The Buddhist Welfare Trust, also founded in the 1980s, had a fund of $425,000 (30 million taka) at the end of the period covered by this report. The trust used funds to repair monasteries, organize training programs for Buddhist monks, and celebrate the Buddhist festival Purnima. There has been no public criticism of how the money is proportioned or distributed.

Major religious festivals and holy days of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian religious groups were celebrated as national holidays. The Bangladesh Christian Association lobbied unsuccessfully for the inclusion of Easter as a national holiday.

Religious organizations were not required to register with the Government; however, all NGOs, including religious organizations, were required to register with the Government's NGO Affairs Bureau if they receive foreign financial assistance for social development projects. The Government had the legal authority to cancel the registration of an NGO suspected to be in breach of its legal or fiduciary obligations and to take other actions, such as blocking foreign funds transfers, to limit its operation. During the reporting period, the Government cancelled the registration of one NGO, Revival of Islamic Heritage, because of alleged links to terrorism financing. In the past, members of NGOs intending to travel to religious freedom events abroad reported pressure by law enforcement and intelligence officials to remain at home, but there were no reports of this occurring during the reporting period.

Religion was taught in Government schools, and parents had the right to have their children taught in their own religion. However, some claimed that many Government-employed religious teachers of minority religious groups were neither members of the religion they taught nor qualified to teach it. Although transportation was not always available for children to attend religion classes away from school, in practice schools with few religious minority students often worked out arrangements with local churches or temples, which then directed religious studies outside of school hours. There were at least 25,000 Muslim religious schools, or madrassahs. Some madrassahs were Government-funded and some were privately-funded, according to a recent U.S. Government study. There were no known Government-run Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion; however, proselytism was discouraged. Foreign missionaries were allowed to work, but as is the case with other foreign residents, they often faced delays of several months in obtaining or renewing visas. In the past, some missionaries who were perceived to be converting Muslims to other religious groups were unable to renew their 1-year religious worker visas. Some foreign missionaries reported that internal security forces and others closely monitored their activities.

The Government continued to oppose court challenges to its 2004 statement banning Ahmadiyya publications on the grounds that the ban had not been promulgated officially and was, therefore, beyond judicial scrutiny. The high court had

stayed the ban, making it unenforceable until the court ruled on it. With a few exceptions, police respected the high court's order.

There were no financial penalties imposed on the basis of religious beliefs; however, religious minorities were disadvantaged in access to military and Government jobs, including elected office. While the Government has appointed some Hindus to senior civil service positions at the deputy secretary, joint secretary, and secretary levels, religious minorities remained underrepresented, especially at the higher ranks. One notable exception was the Government-owned Bangladesh Bank, which employed approximately 10 percent non-Muslims in its upper ranks. Selection boards for Government services often lacked minority representation. Employees were not required to disclose their religion, but it generally could be determined by a person's name.

Many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost because of discrimination under the now-defunct Vested Property Act. The act was an East Pakistan-era law that allowed the Government to expropriate "enemy" (in practice Hindu) lands. The Government seized approximately 2.5 million acres of land from Hindus, affecting almost all of the 10 million Hindus in the country. In April 2001, parliament passed the Vested Property Return Act, stipulating 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 remained resident citizens. 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. In 2002, Parliament passed an amendment to the Vested Property Return Act, which allowed the Government unlimited time to return the vested properties and gave control of the properties, including the right to lease them, to local government employees. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not prepared a list of such properties.

According to a study conducted by a Dhaka University professor, nearly 200,000 Hindu families have lost approximately 40,667 acres of land since 2001, despite the annulment of the Vested Property Act in the same year.

Marriage rituals and proceedings were governed by the family law of the religion of the parties concerned; however, marriages were also registered with the state. Under the Muslim Family Ordinance, female heirs inherit less than male relatives, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Although Muslim men were permitted to have up to four wives, society strongly discourages polygamy, and it was rarely practiced. Laws provide some protection for women against arbitrary divorce and the taking of additional wives by husbands without the first wife's consent, but the protections generally apply only to registered marriages. In rural areas, marriages sometimes were not registered because of ignorance of the law. Under the law, a Muslim husband was required to pay his former wife alimony for 3 months, but this law was not always enforced. There was little societal pressure to enforce it, and the courts were so backlogged it was difficult, if not impossible, to get redress through the courts. There were separate family laws for Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, based on their respective traditions with few significant differences. The major exception was that Hindu law permits unlimited polygamy and makes no provision for divorce or separation, which are forbidden according to the Hindu religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Feminist author Taslima Nasreen remained abroad during the period covered by this report, while criminal charges were pending against her for allegedly insulting the religious beliefs of the country's Muslims. In 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. Her books remained legally banned, but are openly sold by street hawkers.

In June 2005, the government in Dinajpur razed the homes of 65 families to make room for a government project. According to press reports, the evicted families consisted of 15 families from the indigenous Santali Christian community and 50 Hindu families. The families have been allowed to continue living on the property, but the government has not provided any assistance in rebuilding their houses. The Christian community offered to provide them economic assistance.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

On May 1, 2007, three small, near-simultaneous explosions occurred at railway stations in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. There were no deaths, and only one injury. Police recovered signs at two blast sites with anti-Ahmadiyya inscriptions, along with a demand that NGO workers cease their work in Bangladesh within 10 days. The Government ordered increased security at key installations, including Ahmadiyya institutions and NGOs. Although an unknown organization claiming to be a faction of al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks, the initial Government findings were that these were the acts of a minor fringe group.

The Government executed six top leaders of the banned extremist group Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in March 2007. They had been charged with a series of bombings and suicide attacks in 2005, including the assassination of two judges in Jalakathi in November 2005. One of the deceased judges was Hindu, though there is no credible information that he was targeted because of his religion. The local prosecutor who argued the Government's case in the Jalakathi killings was himself assassinated on April 11, apparently in reprisal for the JMB executions.

There have been no significant developments in the cases of the 2004 injury of the British high commissioner in a bomb explosion as he visited the Shahjalal Shrine. In February 2005, there were several explosions at Muslim shrines in the Sylhet area.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued not to enforce the ban on Ahmadiyya publications. Furthermore, protesters were generally stopped from hanging signs outside of Ahmadiyya mosques declaring them non-mosques or threatening the lives or property of Ahmadis. In March, police protected the local Ahmadiyya community when it removed an anti-Ahmadiyya signboard from one of their mosques in Khulna, the first time the police have provided such support.

The Government took steps to promote interfaith understanding. For example, Government leaders issued statements on the eve of religious holidays calling for peace and warned 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 Christian and Hindu festivals, including Durga Puja, Christmas, and Easter.

The Government helped support the Council for Interfaith Harmony-Bangladesh, an organization created in 2005 with a mandate to promote understanding and peaceful coexistence. This initiative came in response to a bombing campaign in the fall of 2005 by an Islamist extremist group seeking the imposition of Shari'a law. The organization has helped facilitate dialogue and panel discussions on religious matters, some of which have been covered by the local media.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report. Clashes between religious groups occasionally occurred. Violence directed against religious minority communities continued to result in the loss of lives and property, but the motives, religious animosity, criminal intent, or property disputes, were often unclear. Religious minorities were vulnerable due to their relatively limited influence with political elites. Like many citizens, they were often reluctant to seek recourse from a corrupt and ineffective criminal justice system. Police were often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minorities. This promotes an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence against them. However, persons who practiced different religions often joined each other's festivals and celebrations such as weddings. Shi'a Muslims practiced their religious beliefs without interference from Sunnis.

Religious minorities were not underrepresented in the private sector. Some Hindus reported that Muslims tended to prefer hiring Hindus for some professional positions, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers and accountants.

Since 2001, it has been routine Government practice to post law enforcement personnel at religious festivals and events, since religious gatherings are usually large and make easy and more attractive targets. Reported incidents included killings, rape, torture, attacks on places of worship, destruction of homes, forced evictions, and desecration of items of worship. These claims continued during the period covered by this report; however, many such reports could not be verified independently, and there were incidents of members of the Muslim community attacking each other on holidays as well, due to a perception that some events were un-Islamic. The Gov-

ernment sometimes failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who were often local gang leaders.

Attacks against the Hindu community at the hand of societal actors continued. According to the Bangladesh Buddhist-Hindu-Christian Unity Council, during the period from January to November 2006 there were a total of 86 killings, 174 attacks on temples, and 80 incidents of assault, rape, theft, looting, or other intimidation.

According to human rights organizations, the military continued to attempt to evict 120 families, 85 percent of them Hindu, from land in the Mirpur area of Dhaka abutting the military cantonment. A temple is also located on the property. The eviction was being carried out on the basis of a 1961 land purchase agreement by the military. The land owners challenged the land acquisition and eviction in court, and the case is still pending.

On June 26, 2007, according to press reports, a group of Muslim villagers attacked recent converts to Christianity in the village of Durbachari. On June 12 several dozen Hindus and Muslims converted to Christianity. In the June 26 incident, a group of Muslims in the village allegedly attacked some of the converts and gave them 24 hours to leave the village. Two or three Christians were injured when they were struck with sticks. Police have stationed a special protective team in the village Durbachari to prevent violence and ensure the converts are able to remain in their homes and work their fields. Police officers also increased patrols of the village, and by the end of the period covered by this report, the district police superintendent had taken steps to reduce tensions in the area.

On April 28, 2007, Taher Miah raped a 10-year-old Hindu girl from the village of Shibnagar. The family of the child filed a police complaint, and Taher was arrested.

On April 19, 2007, police arrested Abdul Malek in connection with the gang rape of a Hindu girl in Toktabonia, Amtali district. Reportedly, she left the village with the perpetrator, who promised to help her find employment. Three other suspects in the crime are being sought by police.

In April 2007, leaders of the Catholic Khasia community in Moulvibazar complained to the local government about harassment by local Forestry Department officials, who oversee the Monchhara Forest where many Khasia live. They stated several forest officials were filing false cases against members of their community, including the head of the local Catholic mission, in order to intimidate them.

The Forestry Department has also been involved in allegations of abuse against minority communities in other parts of the country during the reporting period. On March 18, 2007, Choilesh Ritchil, a Christian Garo from Madhupur, was arrested by local soldiers along with a relative. According to human rights organizations, Ritchil was tortured to death at a local army camp. The relative was released after also being tortured. Ritchil and other local Garos have also been involved in a legal battle with the Forestry Department, which oversees the Madhupur Forest where many Garos live and work. The army denied torturing Ritchil, and claimed he died when he was intoxicated and ran into a tree while fleeing on foot.

The Government arrested several high-level Forestry Department officials and charged them with corruption. Since these arrests, no new charges have been filed against indigenous groups living in the forests, and harassment has been curtailed considerably.

On October 28, 2006, Bashir Ahmed, a 27-year-old Muslim, kidnapped Mary Das, a 12-year-old Hindu girl in Chittagong and married her after conversion into Islam. Police failed to recover the girl or arrest Bashir Ahmed even after the girl's father filed a criminal case. Human rights investigators stated Bashir Ahmed habitually teased Mary Das on her way to school and lured her into going with him on the day of the kidnapping. Police filed charges against Bashir Ahmed and his relatives under the Prevention of Repression on Women and Children Act. Bangladeshi law prohibits marriage under 18 years of age.

Reports of harassment and violence against the Christian community were recorded during the reporting period.

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 2006 religious leaders issued 39 fatwas, demanding punishments ranging from lashings and other physical assaults to shunning by family and community members.

There were approximately 100,000 Ahmadis concentrated in Dhaka and several other locales. While mainstream Muslims rejected some of the Ahmadiyya teachings, the majority supported Ahmadis right to practice without fear or persecution. However, Ahmadis continued to be subject to harassment and violence from those who denounced their teachings.

Since 2004, anti-Ahmadiyya extremists such as the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh and a splinter group, the Khatme Nabuwat Andolon Bangladesh (KNAB), have publicly demanded that the Government pass legislation declaring Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. The Government rejected the ultimatums and successfully kept protesters a safe distance from all Ahmadiyya buildings. According to media reports, State Minister for Religious Affairs, Mosharef Hossain Shajahan, stated "There may be difference of opinion among the followers of a religion, but no one can attack others for such a difference." The Ahmadiyya community complimented the Government for its responsiveness to their concerns and its professional handling of the protests.

The three small bombs that went off on May 1 in Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet left one person in Chittagong injured. Signs left at the scenes of two of the bombings included messages threatening Ahmadis and NGOs. Police immediately increased protection of Ahmaddiyya facilities around the country.

Local officials forced the cancellation of a regional Ahmadiyya conference in Panchagarh, scheduled for March 30 and 21, 2007, because of unspecified alleged security concerns. On January 11, 2007, police recovered 11 unexploded bombs from an Ahmadiyya graveyard in Brahmanbaria.

In early March 2007 police helped Ahmadiyya leaders remove an anti-Ahmadiyya signboard from their mosque in Khulna. The signboard read that the building was not a mosque and the Ahmadiyyas were not Muslims. The removal of the signboard was the first such action by police.

In June 2006, the KNAB again issued demands that the Government declare Ahmadis non-Muslims and on June 23, 2006, approximately 1,500 to 2,000 marchers attempted to seize an Ahmadiyya mosque near Dhaka. In response, police quickly deployed approximately 3,000 police to prevent violence and prevent the protest from approaching the Ahmadiyya complex. KNAB supporters then attempted to block access to Dhaka-Zia International Airport but were stopped by the police. Some 10 to 20 KNAB supporters were injured as a result. Following the KNAB's failure to seize the mosque, the group announced a dawn-to-dusk hartal (strike) and added the demand that Parliament pass a law declaring Muhammad as the last prophet; however, the hartal threat never materialized. A subsequent KNAB attempt to seize to another Ahmadiyya mosque in Dhaka, in October 2006, was also dispersed by police before protestors were able to get near the facilities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with officials at all levels of the Government as well as with political party leaders and representatives of religious and minority communities. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy emphasized the importance of free and fair elections in early 2007, with a goal of averting the violence religious minorities experienced in 2001. When the elections were postponed and the state of emergency was declared, the Embassy expressed its concern about the need to respect human rights, including the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. Embassy staff traveled to regions of the country investigating human rights cases, including some involving religious minorities, and met with civil society members, NGOs, local religious leaders, and other citizens to discuss concerns about violence during the next election and to encourage law enforcement to take proactive measures to protect the rights of religious minorities.

Embassy and visiting U.S. Government officials regularly visited members of minority communities to hear their concerns and demonstrate support.

The Embassy assisted U.S. faith-based relief organizations in guiding paperwork for approval of schools and other projects through Government channels. The Government has been receptive to the discussion of such subjects and generally helpful in resolving problems. The Embassy has also acted as an advocate in the Home Ministry for these organizations in resolving problems with visas.

The Embassy encouraged the Government through the Ministry for Religious Affairs to develop and expand its training program for Islamic religious leaders. After an initial pilot program, the U.S. Government provided, among other topics, course work for religious leaders on human rights and gender equality. For the second year in a row, the U.S. Government sponsored the visit of a prominent Muslim cleric from the United States to tour the country and speak to Bangladeshi audiences. He visited the northwestern city of Rajshahi and also addressed groups in Dhaka about Qur'anic interpretations that support religious tolerance and freedom, as well as gender equity.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Government continued to make religious freedom, especially the problems facing the Ahmadiyya community, a point of discussion in meetings with Government officials. Embassy officers continued to visit

the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dhaka to show support for their security and religious freedom.

The Embassy continued to encourage 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. Democracy and governance projects supported by the United States included tolerance and minority rights components.

BHUTAN

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limited this right in practice by barring non-Buddhist missionaries from entering the country, limiting construction of non-Buddhist religious buildings, and restricting the celebration of some non-Buddhist religious festivals. Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion, although in the southern areas many citizens openly practice Hinduism. The draft Constitution due to be implemented in 2008 would protect freedom of religion, stating that "a Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion."

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. There were no reports of violence associated with pressure to conform to Mahayana beliefs.

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and the country; however, there is cordial and ongoing bilateral interaction, and the U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 18,146 square miles and a population of 672,000, according to the 2005 census. Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of the population practice Drukpa Kagyupa or Ningmapa Buddhism, both of which are disciplines of Mahayana Buddhism. Approximately one-quarter of the population is ethnic Nepalese and practice Hinduism. Christians both Roman Catholic and Protestant and nonreligious groups comprised less than 1 percent of the population.

Ethnic Ngalops, descendants of Tibetan immigrants, comprise the majority of the population in the western and central areas and mostly follow the Drukpa Kargyupa school.

Ethnic Sarchops, descendants of the country's probable original inhabitants, live in the east. Reportedly, some Sarchops practice Buddhism combined with elements of the Bön tradition whereas others follow Animism and Hinduism. Several Sarchops held high positions in the Government, the National Assembly, and the court system.

The Government supports both Kagyupa and Ningmapa Buddhist monasteries. The royal family practices a combination of Ningmapa and Kagyupa Buddhism, and many citizens believe in the concept of "Kanyin-Zungdrel," meaning "Kagyupa and Ningmapa as one."

Bön, the country's animist and shamanistic belief system, revolves around the worship of nature and predates Buddhism. Although Bön priests often officiated and included Bön rituals in Buddhist festivals, very few citizens adhere exclusively to this religious group.

Hindus, mainly in the South, follow the Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Shakta, Ghanapathi, Puranic, and Vedic schools. Hindu temples exist in Thimphu and southern areas, and Hindus practice their religion in small to medium-sized groups.

Christians are present throughout the country in very small numbers. There was reportedly only one building dedicated to Christian worship in the south, the only area with a sufficiently large congregation to sustain a church; elsewhere, Christian families and individuals practice their religion at home. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claimed the Government discouraged open worship by large and small gatherings. There were no Christian missionaries in the country. International Christian relief organizations and Roman Catholic Jesuit priests engaged in education and humanitarian activities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limited this right in practice. In 2005 the Government released to the public a draft Constitution stipulating freedom of religion as a fundamental right. Throughout the reporting period, the country continued to lay the groundwork for its transition to a parliamentary democracy in 2008, including the implementation of the draft Constitution.

Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion. The Government discouraged both large and small religious gatherings of non-Buddhists, did not allow construction of non-Buddhist places of worship, and did not allow non-Buddhist missionaries to work in the country.

No new buildings, including new places of worship, can be constructed without licenses.

While the current Constitution does not restrict the right to convert or proselytize, proselytism is prohibited based on a Royal Government decision. Forced conversion is addressed in the draft Constitution. Article 7 states: "No person shall be compelled to belong to another faith by means of coercion or inducement."

The National Security Act (NSA) prohibits "words either spoken or written, or by other means whatsoever, that promote or attempt to promote, on grounds of religion, race, language, caste or community, or on any other ground whatsoever, feelings of enmity or hatred between different religious, racial or language groups or castes and communities." Violating the NSA is punishable with up to 3 years' imprisonment although it is not clear that the Government has enforced this provision of the act.

There are no laws against publishing religious material.

An annual Government grant finances the country's Monastic Body of 3,500 monks. By statute, 10 seats in the 150-seat National Assembly and 2 seats on the 11-member Royal Advisory Council are reserved for Buddhist monks out of respect for the country's tradition of Buddhist spiritual oversight. There are no religious stipulations on the remaining seats. Many non-Buddhists work for the Government. The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, with a Hindu priest as a member, also advises on religious matters.

The Marriage Act of 1980, as amended in 1996, addresses questions of family law subjects such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and child custody. Traditionally, Buddhists and Hindus have resolved questions of family law according to their religion; however, this is changing as the country takes steps to strengthen its legal system. The country's evolving legal system is based on customary law and Buddhist precepts.

The Government subsidizes Buddhist monasteries and shrines and provides aid to approximately one-third of the kingdom's 12,000 monks. The Government committed to providing this support as a result of the 1956 land reform program, which stripped the monastic establishment of wide tracts of fertile land for redistribution among the landless.

Major Buddhist holy days are state holidays. The King declared one major Hindu festival as a national holiday, and the royal family participated in it.

NGO representatives living outside the country and dissidents reported that only Drukpa Kagyupa and Ningmapa Buddhist religious teaching was permitted in schools and that Buddhist prayer was compulsory in all Government-run schools. The Government contended that there was no religious curriculum in modern educational institutions in the country. Buddhist teaching was permitted only in monastic schools; religious teaching was forbidden in other schools. Local NGO interlocutors confirmed that although students took part in a prayer session each morning, it was nondenominational and not compulsory.

The Government requires all citizens to wear the traditional dress in public places; however, it only strictly enforced this law for visits to Buddhist religious buildings, monasteries, Government offices, schools, and for attendance at official functions and public ceremonies. Some citizens commented that enforcement of this law was arbitrary and sporadic.

The Government continued issuing new national identity cards to "genuine" Bhutanese. People holding residential permits, marriage certificate cards (those married to Bhutanese) and time-bound certificates were not eligible to receive the new ID card. The Government also indicated that ethnic Nepalese who have family members living in refugee camps in Nepal would be eligible. However, reports suggested that this had yet to be implemented.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Followers of religious groups other than Buddhism and Hinduism generally were free to worship in private homes, but NGOs alleged that they were prohibited from erecting religious buildings or congregating in public. Some Christian groups reported that religious meetings must be held discreetly, especially in rural areas, for fear of the authorities. There is reportedly one building used for Christian worship in the south.

No new buildings, including places of worship, can be constructed without Government licenses. Reports by ethnic Nepalese citizens suggested that this process favored Buddhist temples over Hindu ones. The Government provided financial assistance for the construction of Buddhist temples and shrines and state funding for monks and monasteries. NGOs alleged that the Government rarely granted permission to build Hindu temples; the last report of such construction was in the early 1990s, when the Government authorized the construction and renovation of Hindu temples and centers of Sanskrit and Hindu learning and provided state funds to help finance the projects. The Government argued that it was a matter of supply and demand, with demand for Buddhist temples far exceeding that for Hindu temples. The Government stated that it supported numerous Hindu temples in the south, where most Hindus reside, and provided some scholarships for Hindus to study Sanskrit in India.

Certain senior civil servants, regardless of religion, are required to take an oath of allegiance to the king, the country, and the people. The oath does not have religious content, but a Buddhist lama administers it. Dissidents alleged that applicants have been asked their religion before receiving Government services.

Unlike previous years, there were no reports of promotion denials to some of the handful of Christians in Government service.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, many ethnic Nepalese residents, a majority of whom were Hindu, were forcibly expelled or voluntarily left as a result of discrimination. The Government claimed they were illegal immigrants with no right to citizenship or residency. Some of those expelled asserted the right of return. While the Government accepted that at least a few hundred have a legitimate claim to citizenship, it has not permitted them to return. More than 100,000 people remained in refugee camps in Eastern Nepal. (For a more detailed discussion, see the 2006 Country Report on Human Rights Practices.) The Government resettled citizens from other parts of the country on Government-owned land in the south vacated by the expelled ethnic Nepalese. Human rights groups maintained that this action prejudiced any possibility of land restoration to returning refugees. The Government maintained that this was not its first resettlement program and that ethnic Nepalese citizens from the south sometimes were resettled in other areas.

In January 2006 authorities arrested two civil servants in the village of Nago in Paro District, accusing them of engaging in acts of proselytism under the false pretext of holding an official meeting, maligning the Spiritual Head of Bhutan, posing as officials on official business, and giving false information. In accordance with provisions in the Bhutan Penal Code and the National Security Act, both men were found guilty in a district court. Christian groups maintained the men were arrested due to their religious beliefs since, according to these groups, the men were arrested while showing a Christian film in a Buddhist home. They were sentenced in early June 2006 in an open trial with a public hearing to 3½ years and 3 years in prison. They did not appeal the court judgment, although the right to appeal was provided for by law. On July 28, 2006, both men were released after payment of a fine.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Societal pressures toward non-Buddhists were reflected in official and unofficial efforts to impose the dress and cultural norms of the Buddhist majority on all citizens. While there were no reports of the repetition of the excesses of the late 1980s and early 1990s, societal and governmental pressure for conformity with Drukpa Kagyupa norms was prevalent.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and the country. Informal contacts between the two Governments took place frequently. During these exchanges, U.S. officials discussed governmental discrimination against the ethnic Nepalese minority.

Periodically throughout the reporting period, officers from the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi discussed religious freedom issues with the Government in Thimphu in the context of refugee problems and the 2005 draft Constitution. During meetings, officials discussed the draft Constitution, including the inclusion of guarantees of religious freedom and protection for minority populations. The officials also reiterated the importance of finding a lasting solution for the mostly Hindu refugees in Nepal in order to demonstrate the Government's commitment to religious tolerance.

The U.S. Government also worked to promote religious freedom and other democratic values by sponsoring travel of several citizens to the United States under the International Visitors, Humphrey, and Fulbright programs.

INDIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice. However, some state and local governments limited this freedom in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the National Government during the period covered by this report and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, problems remained in some areas. Some state governments enacted and amended "anti-conversion" laws and police and enforcement agencies often did not act swiftly enough to effectively counter societal attacks, including attacks against religious minorities. Despite Government efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities, particularly at the state and local level, as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity, although numerous cases were in the courts at the end of the reporting period. The National Government, led by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), continued to implement an inclusive and secular platform that included respect for the right to religious freedom.

Despite the National Government's rejection of "Hindutva," the ideology that espouses the inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms above other religious norms, it continued to influence some Government policies and actions at the state and local levels. During the reporting period, the Government of Himachal Pradesh enacted a state-level "anti-conversion" law, which, similar to other laws of its kind, restricts and regulates religious proselytism. The law prohibits an individual from using "force, inducement, or fraudulent means" when contributing, in speech or conduct, to another individual's religious conversion. The Governments of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat amended their existing laws. The Governor of Rajasthan, later elevated to the Presidency, refused to sign her State's anti-conversion law, effectively nullifying it. Although these laws do not explicitly ban conversions, many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) argue that in practice, "anti-conversion" laws, both by their design and implementation, infringe upon the individual's right to convert, favor Hinduism over minority religions, and represent a significant challenge to Indian secularism.

The vast majority of Indians of every religious group lived in peaceful coexistence; however, there were reports of organized societal attacks against minority religious groups, particularly in states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Some NGOs report that societal violence against religious minorities is part of a larger Hindu nationalist agenda and corresponds with ongoing state electoral politics.

Terrorists attempted to provoke interreligious conflict by detonating bombs in Hyderabad in May 2007, in Nanded (Central Maharashtra) in February 2007, in the Muslim majority town of Malegaon (North Maharashtra) in September 2006, and in commuter trains in Mumbai in July 2006.

During the reporting period, societal violence also continued between Hindus and Muslims over disputed places of worship. The Bhojshala complex in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh is one such case where, since 2002, both Hindus and Muslims have disputed the right of the other group to offer prayers.

Hundreds of court cases remained in connection with the 2002 Gujarat violence.

The U.S. Embassy and its consulates promoted religious freedom in their discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials,

and supported initiatives to encourage religious and communal harmony. During meetings with key leaders of all significant religious communities, U.S. senior officials discussed reports of harassment of minority groups, converts, and missionaries, as well as state-level legislation restricting conversion, the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat, and the plight of displaced Kashmiri Pandits.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1.3 million square miles and a population of 1.1 billion. According to the 2001 Government census, Hindus constitute 80.5 percent of the population, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.8 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, 1.1 percent. Slightly more than 90 percent of Muslims are Sunni; the rest are Shi'a. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which are generally included among Hindus in Government statistics, often practiced traditional indigenous religions (animism).

Large Muslim populations are found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, and Muslims are the majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christians are concentrated in the northeast, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya) have large Christian majorities. Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab.

There are Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh missionaries operating in the country.

Approximately 200 million persons or 17 percent of the population belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST, formerly called "untouchables"). Some converted from Hinduism to other religious groups, ostensibly to escape widespread discrimination.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice; however, some state and local governments limited this freedom by enacting or amending "anti-conversion" legislation, and by not efficiently or effectively prosecuting those who attacked religious minorities.

The country is a secular state with no official religion. The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose or change their religion as well as practice the religion of one's choice. Many NGOs argue that state-level "anti-conversion" laws are unconstitutional and may reinforce the dominance of the Hindu majority. While the law generally provides remedy for violations of religious freedom, it was not enforced rigorously or effectively in many cases pertaining to religious-oriented violence. Legal protections existed to cover discrimination or persecution by private actors. The country's political system is Federal and accords state governments the exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and the maintenance of order, which limits the national Government's capacity to deal directly with state-level abuses, including abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), cannot investigate a crime committed in a state without the State Government's permission. However, the National Government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have intervened to maintain order when state governments were reluctant or unwilling to do so.

The opposition BJP, the political wing of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization, held power in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Uttarakhand and is part of the ruling coalition in Punjab, Karnataka, Bihar, and Orissa. Several NGOs alleged that during the reporting period, the BJP stoked communally sensitive matters as State elections grew near.

The Ministry for Minority Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) are governmental bodies created to investigate allegations of discrimination and make recommendations for redress to the relevant local or national Government authorities. Although NHRC recommendations do not have the force of law, central and local authorities generally follow them. The NCM and NHRC intervened in several high profile cases, including the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat and other instances of communal tension, the enactment of anti-conversion legislation in several states, and incidents of harassment and violence against minorities.

Federal and state laws that regulate religion include the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, several state-level "anti-conversion" laws, the Un-

lawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967, the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988, India's Foreigners Act of 1946, and the Indian Divorce Act of 1869.

The FCRA regulates foreign contributions to NGOs, including faith-based NGOs. Some organizations complained that the FCRA prevented them from properly financing humanitarian and educational activities.

There are active "anti-conversion" laws in 4 of the 28 States: Orissa, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh; however there were no reports of convictions under these laws during the reporting period. Gujarat and Arunchal Pradesh have inactive "anti-conversion" laws awaiting accompanying regulations needed for enforcement. In September 2006 the Gujarat State Assembly passed an amendment to make further clarifications on the provisions of the law, but the Governor did not take action by the end of the reporting period. The Rajasthan law passed the State Assembly during the previous reporting period, but was refused twice by the Governor and forwarded to the President on June 20, 2007, for legal review and guidance on its constitutional merit.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 states, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." The law defines force as "a show of force or a threat for injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication," fraud as "misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance" and inducement as "the offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise." Individuals breaking the law are subject to penalties such as imprisonment, a fine, or both. These penalties are harsher if the offence involves minors, women, or a person belonging to SC/ST. The law also requires that District Magistrates maintain a list of religious organizations and individuals propagating religious beliefs, that individuals intending to convert provide a declaration before a Magistrate, that priests declare the intent to officiate in a conversion ceremony, and that police officers determine if there are objections to a given conversion. There were no reports of district magistrates denying permission for religious conversions or of convictions under the Act during the period covered by this report.

Under current provisions in the states of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, it is prohibited "to convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." Such an offense is punishable with a maximum of 2 years' imprisonment, and a maximum fine of $220 (8,800 INR), with harsher penalties in the case of children, women, or members of SC/ST. In July 2006, the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh enacted changes to their existing laws. These require that an individual planning on converting obtain prior permission from district authorities. Christians intending to "reconvert" to Hinduism do not have to fulfill this requirement. The amendments became void in January 2007; the respective Governors did not approve the bills before then.

The State Assembly passed the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 2006 in December 2006 and the Governor signed into law on February 19, 2007. The law is unique because the secular Congress party generated and passed it, while states ruled by the BJP enacted all of the other "anti-conversion" laws. The law states, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any other fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." The law stipulates punishment of up to 2 years' imprisonment and/or a fine of $625 (25,000 INR). If SC/ST members or minors are involved, 5 years' imprisonment and/or $1,250 (50,000 INR) fine is the penalty. Any members of a religious group wishing to change his or her religious beliefs is required to give 30 days prior information to district authorities or otherwise face punishment of 1 month imprisonment and/or $25 (1,000 INR) fine. However, returning back to a previous religious group is not considered violating this law.

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967 empowers the Government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in terrorism or sedition, or violated the 1976 FCRA.

There were no requirements for religious groups to be licensed in the country; however, the Government prohibits foreign missionaries of any religious group from entering the country without prior clearance, and usually expels those who perform missionary work without the correct visa. Long established foreign missionaries generally can renew their visas, but the Government has not admitted new resident foreign missionaries since the mid-1960s. There is no national law barring a citizen

or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs; however, the country's Foreigners Act prohibits speaking publicly against the religious beliefs of others, as it is deemed dangerous to public order. The Act prohibits visitors on tourist visas from preaching without prior permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and West Bengal have laws regulating the construction of public religious buildings and the use of public places for religious purposes.

On July 21, 2006, the Kerala High Court ruled that taking an official oath in the name of Allah is constitutionally valid. Observing that Allah is synonymous with God, the High Court dismissed a writ petition challenging the constitutional validity of the oath taken by 11 Muslim members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly who had used the name of Allah.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 lists offenses, including those pertaining to religious duties and practices, against disadvantaged persons and provides for stiff penalties for offenders.

Article 17 of the Constitution outlawed untouchability; however, members of lower castes remained in a disadvantageous position. The Government continued to implement a quota system which reserved Government jobs and seats in higher education institutions for SC/ST members belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist religions, but not for Christians or Muslims.

Christian groups filed a court case demanding that SC/ST converts to Christianity and Islam enjoy the same access to "reservations" as other SC/STs and argued that Christian SC/STs suffer from the same caste-based socio, economic and political stigmas and discrimination. The usual counter argument is that there is no caste system in Christianity and, therefore, no need to extend reservations to SC/ST Christians. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which had not ruled by the end of the reporting period. Reservations existed in Andhra Pradesh for followers of Islam.

Under Article 25 of the Constitution, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists are considered sects of Hinduism; however, these groups continue to view themselves as unique religions and sought to introduce their own separate personal laws. Sikhs have sought a separately codified body of law to legally recognize their uniqueness and preclude ambiguity. The 1992 National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Act identified Buddhism as a separate religion. The Supreme Court rejected the inclusion of Jains under the NCM Act, stating that the practice of adding new religious groups as minorities should be discouraged.

There are different personal status laws for the various religious communities, and the legal system accommodates religion-specific laws in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. The Government grants a significant amount of autonomy to personal status law boards in crafting these laws. There is a Hindu law, a Christian law, a Parsi law, and a Muslim law—all legally recognized and judicially enforceable. None of these are exempt from national and state level legislative powers and social reform obligations as laid down in the Constitution.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 limits inheritance, alimony payments, and property ownership of persons from interfaith marriages and prohibits their use of churches to celebrate marriage ceremonies in which one party is a non-Christian. Clergymen who contravene its provisions could face up to 10 years' imprisonment. However, the act does not bar interfaith marriages in other places of worship.

The Government permits private religious schools, but does not permit religious instruction in Government schools. The Government may prescribe merit-based admission for religious colleges that receive public funding, while those that do not may use their own criteria, including religious affiliation.

Many Hindu sects have established schools, although they did not receive aid from the state. Most Islamic madrassahs did not accept Government aid, alleging that it would subject them to stringent security clearance requirements. Educational institutions given "minority status" by the Government are not eligible for Government aid.

The West Bengal Government administers most undergraduate and post-graduate sections of madrassahs in the state and the state's Public Service Commission hires madrassah teachers and regulates their curriculum. Approximately 25 percent of the 400,000 students attending madrassahs in West Bengal and 15 percent of their 10,000 teachers are non-Muslims.

The Government's National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) publishes textbooks that are uniformly used in Government and private schools and printed in various languages. In 2007 the Government released new NCERT textbooks which it asserted more accurately portrayed minority religious groups, among other changes, and restored the secular character of education; however, some schools have not yet received the textbooks.

In 2004 Parliament passed a bill creating the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions and in March 2006, it empowered the Commission to resolve disputes and investigate complaints regarding violations of minority rights, including the right to establish and administer educational institutions.

The major holy days of the country's predominant religious groups are also considered national holidays, including Good Friday and Christmas (Christian); the two Eids (Muslim); Lord Buddha's birthday (Buddhist); Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh); Dussehra, Diwali, and Holi (Hindu); and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

No religious organizations were banned under UAPA during the reporting period. The Government renewed the ban on the Student Islamic Movement of India on February 15, 2007, for the fourth time, based on concerns about terrorism. In 2005 the Government extended the ban on the Muslim group Deendar Anjuman until 2007.

In contrast to previous years, the Gujarat Charity Commissioner did not request financial statements from faith-based charities.

During the reporting period, press reports documented the activities of foreign missionaries who entered on tourist visas and illegally proselytized. Foreigners with tourist visas who engage in missionary activity are subject to deportation and possible criminal prosecution. Foreigners are responsible for requesting the correct type of visa; generally, there are no provisions for changing a person's immigration category once admitted.

The Government maintained a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country because they contain material that governmental censors deem inflammatory and could provoke communal or religious tensions. The Rajasthan Government continued to ban the books *Haqeeqat* (The Truth) and *Ve Sharm Se Hindu Kahate Hain Kyon?* (Why Do They Say With Shame They Are Hindus?) for alleged blasphemy against Hindu gods.

In February 2007 cinema owners and distributors in Gujarat refused to screen the film "Parzania," depicting the sufferings of a Parsi family during the 2002 violence, out of fear of rekindling communal tensions and retaliation by the Hindu right, especially Bajrang Dal leader Babu Bajrangi of Ahmedabad. Hindutva groups in Gujarat, where the 2002 violence took place, had threatened to attack theaters that showed the film. The Indian Censor Board had already approved the film for countrywide distribution and the film was shown elsewhere in the country.

Buddhist monks questioned the non-Buddhist control of management of the 1,500-year-old Mahabodhi temple in Bihar's Bodh Gaya. The monks also accused non-Buddhists of chopping off a branch of the holy Mahabodhi tree. The monks requested that the Government hand over management of the temple to them by amending the Mahabodhi Temple Management Act.

Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the FCRA, which limits overseas assistance to certain NGOs, including ones with religious affiliations.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While there were no reports accusing the National Government of committing abuses of religious freedom, human rights activists criticized it for alleged indifference and inaction in the face of abuses committed by state and local authorities and private citizens.

The opposition party BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) claimed to respect and tolerate other religious groups. However, the RSS opposed conversions from Hinduism and expressed the view that all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, should adhere to Hindu cultural values. During the reporting period, the BJP continued to advocate for contentious measures such as the passage of "anti-conversion" legislation in all states in the country, the construction of a Hindu temple in the Ayodhya site, and the enactment of a uniform civil code.

The BJP was associated with some instances of dissemination of information promoting religious intolerance. On April 11, 2007, the BJP released a widely criticized Compact Disk (CD) as part of its Uttar Pradesh election campaign material. The National Commission for Minorities called upon the National and State Governments to take serious note of offensive depictions of the Muslim community contained in the CD. The BJP claimed to have withdrawn the CD, however, its contents were published and broadcast by the media. The circulation of such material appeared in the wake of similarly provocative leaflets surfacing in different parts of the country. The Election Commission notified the BJP and filed cases against those involved in the matter under the Representation of People's Act.

In the state of Karnataka, Christian and human rights groups reported increased attacks and harassment following the formation of a coalition government that includes the BJP.

On February 20, 2007, a local BJP leader, Panat Ram, and his followers allegedly attacked three pastors of the Believers' Church while they were holding a prayer meeting in Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh. Elisha Baker, Balbir Kher, and Nan Sai were slightly injured. Panat Ram also tried to register a complaint against the pastors for engaging in conversion activities. Police investigated the complaint but found it unsubstantiated, and did not register a First Information Report (FIR) against the pastors.

On November 9, 2006, a local BJP politician and party workers allegedly attacked six Christians at a village meeting in Bastar, Chhattisgarh. According to the Christians, police refused to file an FIR against the attackers.

On October 10, 2006, the Chhattisgarh BJP government reportedly closed a Government-financed, Christian-operated child nutrition services center in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh. The Government fired 17 employees of the center on suspicion of engaging in conversion activities.

According to religious media outlets, on December 4, 2006, a sub-inspector of police in Kondapur, Andra Pradesh, assaulted a group of Christians displaying a religious film. Reportedly, the officer disrupted the viewing despite the fact that the village head had granted permission to the Christian community.

On August 19, 2006, police officers allegedly pressured a Christian convert to reconvert back to Hinduism in Devangere, Karnataka.

In August 2006 in Radhanpur, Gujarat, police firing killed three people (two Muslims and one Hindu) during protests by Muslims of the local administration's action to breach the wall of a Muslim cemetery to let flooding waters subside.

According to reports, on July 16, 2006, the police in Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh physically assaulted a Christian convert allegedly, at the behest of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) members.

In July 2006 in Bhiwandi, while dispersing a rioting mob of Muslim protestors, Maharashtra police killed two Muslims. Two Hindu policemen were subsequently lynched by rioters in a dispute between a Muslim organization and the police over the construction of a police station adjacent to a Muslim cemetery. The mob burned several buses of a local public transport company and 18 people were injured, including 12 policemen.

There were reports of arrests under state-level "anti-conversion" laws and other restrictive laws during the reporting period.

On April 5, 2007, authorities in Andhra Pradesh arrested three pastors and filed cases under IPC 295A and 298 for hurting religious sentiments. Local residents alleged that the pastors led 26 foreign tourists, including several Americans, into the Chikadpally slum in Hyderabad where they engaged in conversions, and made derogatory remarks against Hindu Gods.

On March 20, 2007, Bangalore police arrested two Christian missionaries, including one American citizen, for allegedly making slanderous statements ridiculing Hindu deities. Both missionaries were released on bail the next day.

According to reports, in December 2006 the Bajrang Dal allegedly assaulted a pastor and 20 other Christians in Chhattisgarh who were singing Christmas carols. Five individuals were seriously injured. The pastor and 10 others were subsequently arrested for forcibly converting others.

According to religious media, on September 21, 2006, a day after the Gujarat State Assembly passed an amendment to the 2003 "anti-conversion law," a group of extremists attacked eight Christians belonging to the Indian Missionary Society. The Christians filed a complaint against nine attackers and the police sub-inspector for physical abuse. Subsequently, authorities arrested the attacked on charges of engaging in forced conversions and carrying weapons.

There were 11 reported arrests under the Madhya Pradesh "anti-conversion" law. This compares with 20 arrested during the previous reporting period. However, there were no convictions and all those arrested were released on bail with their cases pending. Faith-based NGOs and the media indicated that authorities arrested 4 people in Andhra Pradesh, 14 in Chhattisgarh, 28 in Madhya Pradesh, 2 in Orissa, and 1 in Uttar Pradesh during the previous reporting period. Many of these cases involved societal attacks on Christians or their property, and in some cases, police brutality was reported. In one instance, the attacked were reportedly arrested instead.

The Government, in response to a Delhi high court ruling in connection with the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, paid $3,075 (123,000 INR) to several persons injured during the riots. In March 2007 a Delhi high court convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment three persons—Harprasad Bhardwaj, RP Tiwari, and Jagdish Giri—for lynch-

ing a Sikh policeman, his son, and another relative during the anti-Sikh riots. Two other co-accuseds were acquitted due to insufficient evidence. The court also fined each convict $125 (5,000 INR). In May 2005 a Delhi court also sentenced five individuals to life imprisonment for murder in connection with the riots.

The Government did not take any action during the reporting period to open cases against Minister Jagdish Tytler and Member of Parliament Sajjan Kumar, who were named in the Nanavati Commission's 2005 report on the 1984 massacre. According to the CBI, there is little evidence against Tytler and Kumar.

In May 2006 despite Muslim community protests, the Vadodara City Government demolished a 300-year-old shrine in Gujarat. While dispersing a mob of Muslim protestors, the Gujarat police killed two Muslims. The mob set four shops on fire in retaliation. Three Hindus were also stabbed to death in the mob violence and a group of Hindus set one Muslim man on fire. The Home Ministry deployed paramilitary forces and the army to assist local security personnel. The media reported that 6 persons were killed and 42 injured, 16 as a result of police fire. The NCM urged the State Government to ascertain if police firing was unavoidable and if the decision to destroy the shrine was justified. During the reporting period, the Gujarat Government did not take any steps to restore the shrine.

Press reported that in January 2006, 10 persons were injured after the demolition of the Christ Mission Ashram church in south Calcutta, West Bengal, in a clash between church members and Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority workers. The Government later allotted alternate land to the mission to relocate the church and its facilities.

Police and state authorities took timely steps to end the violence and curb mob actions during outbreaks of politically-motivated religious tension in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat in early 2006.

In 2006 police launched a judicial inquiry into clashes between Hindu and Muslim residents in Uttar Pradesh. An NCM investigation determined that the Uttar Pradesh administration initially did not take appropriate steps to prevent the violence.

Between May and October 2005, communal riots in Uttar Pradesh resulted in the deaths of 7 persons and wounding of 36, including 8 police officers. In October 2005 the Uttar Pradesh Government convened a three-member committee to determine the cause of the riots and filed charges against BJP politicians Mukhtar Ansari and Ramji Singh for inciting communal discord. The committee also reported that BJP Member of Parliament Yogi Adityanath had a role in instigating the communal clashes, but did not file charges against him.

Allegations of forced conversion and "defamation of Hinduism" led to harassment of Emmanuel Ministries International (EMI), a large charitable organization in Rajasthan by members of the Sangh Parivar. In February 2006 the Rajasthan Government revoked the licenses of EMI-owned charities such as a bible institute, orphanage, school, hospital, and church. In March 2006 the Department of Social Welfare of Rajasthan froze the organization's bank accounts. In June 2006 the Jaipur High Court instructed the State Government to show cause regarding the closing of the EMI property and instructed the accounts to be unfrozen. See section on Societal Abuses.

Authorities held EMI President Samuel Thomas in judicial custody from March 17 to May 2, 2006, for hurting the religious sentiments of Hindus. Thomas was later charged with sedition in May 2006 for the use of a map on an EMI-affiliated Web site that did not include Jammu and Kashmir as part of the country. The Supreme Court granted Thomas bail, but restricted his travel. By the end of this reporting period, the sedition charges had not been dropped.

In June 2006, according to religious media, policemen verbally and physically abused four tribal Christians in Maharashtra who tried to follow up on a FIR. The four were then charged with breach of peace. A police inquiry into the case resulted in the removal of one police officer. No further action had been taken by the end of the reporting period.

In May 2006 in Punjab, after protests by Delhi All-India Christian Council (AICC) leaders, police arrested three Hindu extremists for a raid on an Easter Day event, in which they threatened worshippers and vandalized property. When the pastor attempted to register a FIR, the Senior Superintendent of Police at first told him that permission from the district magistrate was required, but later recanted and permitted the services.

There was continued concern about the failure of the Gujarat Government to arrest and convict those responsible for the widespread communal violence in 2002. Home Ministry figures released in May 2005 indicated that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, and 2,500 others injured. Some NGOs maintained the number of Muslims killed was higher, with figures ranging anywhere from 1,000 to 2,500.

There were also reports of rape, gang rape, and molestation of Muslim women. According to an October 2005 survey by the NHRC monitoring committee, approximately 4,300 Muslim families (between 25,000–30,000 individuals) were still internally displaced and living in makeshift camps with inadequate infrastructure facilities. People told the committee that they feared retaliation by their Hindu neighbors if they returned to their native villages. They also feared that Hindu neighbors would pressure them to withdraw their complaints filed in connection with the 2002 violence.

In March 2006 the Government-established commission headed by Justice Banerjee issued a report stating that the train fire was an accident and ruled out a Muslim conspiracy. The commission also accused the then-railway-Minister and the Railway Safety Commission of failing to adequately investigate the accident. The Gujarat High Court initially prevented the release of the report to Parliament; however, Indian Railways petitioned the Indian Supreme Court for its release, an appeal that was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Nanavati-Shah commission, established in April 2002, continued its hearings into the Gujarat 2002 violence. It has received 6-month extensions on a regular basis and its current term is scheduled to end December 2007.

In its February 2006 response to the Supreme Court, the Gujarat police said that it would reexamine 1,600 of the 2,108 cases that were closed after the riots. However, during the reporting period, the Gujarat police had closed as many as 1,600 cases, citing the unavailability of witnesses.

During the previous reporting period, the Gujarat police registered 13 new riot-related cases and arrested 640 accused between August 2004 and February 2006. However, accused individuals were acquitted in several other cases because of lack of evidence or changes in testimony. During the reporting period, several fresh FIRs were registered on the basis of sworn affidavits of victims. On the basis of these affidavits, two prominent accused persons were arrested—Mahant Parshottamgiri Goswami, a high priest of a Hindu sub-sect in Vadodara, and Rajesh Katara, the son of Dahod BJP MP Babubhai Katara.

According to a report submitted by the Government to a U.N. agency in October 2006, 6 cases relating to 2002 violence resulted in convictions, whereas 182 cases resulted in acquittals. Human rights groups contend that, barring the few high-profile cases the Indian Supreme Court is directly supervising, the majority of the accused would not be convicted.

In October 2005 "fast track" courts in Gujarat sentenced 5 persons to life imprisonment for the murder of 12 Muslims during the riot period. The courts sentenced others to 3 years' imprisonment and ordered them to pay a fine of $11 (500 INR) each, which they had not paid by the end of the reporting period. Local courts acquitted 107 of 113 persons arrested for killing 2 Muslims, and indicted 39 police officers for riot-related conduct.

The Bilkis Bano case continued its hearings in a Mumbai court during the reporting period. In February 2006 a special court in Mumbai convicted 9 persons of the murder of 14 Muslims in the Best Bakery case and sentenced them to life in prison. The court acquitted another eight. Many human rights groups continue to argue that, despite the Best Bakery verdict, those responsible for the 2002 Gujarat violence will go unpunished. Primary witness Zahira Shaikh was sentenced to 1 year imprisonment and fined an estimated $1,200 (48,000 INR) for perjury. She served her prison sentence; the Supreme Court waived the fine.

In June 2005 the Central Prevention Of Terrorism Act (POTA) Review Committee recommended that POTA charges be dropped against many Muslims in connection with the Gujarat violence due to insufficient evidence; however, at the end of the reporting period the charges were still in effect. Approximately, 150 Muslim youth remain in detention under POTA in Gujarat (the majority of them accused in the Godhra train burning case).

In March 2005 Gujarat police detained at least 400 persons to prevent Hindu-Muslim clashes during the Shi'a Muslim day of mourning (Muharram); the same month, Muslims called off a Muharram procession in Vadodara to prevent potential clashes with Hindus. Throughout the reporting period, Muharram processions took place peacefully in Gujarat.

Since an organized insurgency erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, there have been numerous reports of human rights abuses by security forces, local officials, and separatists. It remained difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists were predominantly Muslim, and almost all the higher ranks as well as most of the lower ranks in the Indian military forces stationed there were non-Muslim. The vast majority of the 61,000 member Jammu and Kashmir police force was Muslim. Kashmiri Hindus remained vulnerable to violence.

Most lived in refugee camps outside of the valley awaiting safe return. In May 2004 and 2005 and in April 2006 the Jammu and Kashmir Government allowed a procession of separatist groups to mark the anniversary of the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

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.

Authorities arrested numerous Christians under state-level "anti-conversions" laws during the reporting period for allegedly engaging in conversions by force, allurement, or fraud. (For more information, see Abuses section.) Hindu nationalist organizations frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured low-caste Hindus with offers of free education and healthcare and equated such actions with forced conversions. Christians responded that low-caste Hindus convert of their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to "re-convert" these new Christians to Hinduism were themselves accompanied by offers of remuneration and thus, fraudulent.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

Terrorist groups perpetrated atrocities against civilians, including minority Hindu members of the Pandit (Hindu Brahmin) community, in the long-lasting insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, including car bombings, forced housing of terrorists, executions, and sexual assaults. Retaliatory killings by terrorists were also common. Security forces used targeted but at times excessive force to suppress them, with civilians frequently the main victims.

Terrorists attempted to provoke interreligious conflict by detonating bombs.

In May 2007 12 persons were killed and 40 injured when a bomb exploded during Friday prayers at the Mecca mosque in the Charminar area in Hyderabad. Investigations are ongoing and a few persons were arrested for questioning.

In February 2007 in Nanded (Central Maharashtra), two alleged bomb-makers died when their bombs exploded.

In September 2006 in the Muslim majority town of Malegaon (North Maharashtra) on the eve of an important Shi'a festival, 38 people died, and more than 100 were injured due to a series of bomb explosions in and around a mosque.

On August 16, 2006, during the celebrations of the birth of Lord Krishna, a powerful bomb explosion killed five persons and injured many others at the International Society for Krishna Consciousness temple in Imphal, Manipur. The shrine was crowded with devotees, including foreigners, when the blast took place. Manipur police are still investigating the case. Manipur has a number of insurgent underground groups that perpetrate violence on civilians.

On July 11, 2006, in Mumbai, a series of bombs exploded in commuter trains killing approximately 200 people and injuring over 700, as part of a terrorist campaign to incite widespread Hindu/Muslim rioting and destroy the India/Pakistan peace initiative.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Prime Minister's Office released the Sachar Report, a study on the socio-economic status of Muslims in the country, during the reporting period. It presented data documenting that Muslims lagged behind the general public in many social indicators. In January 2007 based on this report, the UPA government directed all banks to provide preferential loans to minorities. Furthermore, in April 2007 the Prime Minister said that efforts would be made to ensure women and minorities are "properly represented" at all levels in Government.

In March 2007 the National Government announced it would pay approximately $8,100 (324,000 INR) in additional compensation to the next of kin of persons killed in the 2002 Gujarat violence. The compensation supplements the $4,651 (186,040 INR) compensation already paid by the Government of Gujarat for each victim. However, there was no timetable for when these compensation amounts will be paid.

In May 2007 the National Government moved a Constitution Amendment Bill to grant constitutional status to the National Minorities Commission.

The Gujarat State Government banned an anti-Christian rally announced by the VHP and the RSS, planned for Christmas Day of 2006 in the Dangs district of Gujarat. The rally was organized in response to the desecration of eight Hindu religious statues by unknown persons on December 14, 2006. Christian groups petitioned the Government to ban the rally.

On December 29, 2006, Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh announced a 4 percent reservation policy for Muslims in Government jobs. He reported that al-

though the community comprised 7 percent of the state's population, it represented only 2.57 percent in Government jobs.

The Assam State Government has drafted a $148 million (595-crore INR) development package for the state's Muslims, comprising approximately 30 percent of its population. The state has a Muslim population of 8.2 million, the majority of whom are confined to the most economically-depressed areas. The package is designed to spur economic activity in minority-dominated areas and to develop community infrastructure. Congress President Sonia Gandhi and a number of central Muslim leaders attended an all-Assam minority convention on May 10, 2007.

In January 2007 on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Vasant Pachami, the local BJP administration avoided strife by allowing both Hindus and Muslims to offer prayers at a disputed religious site in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, but at different times during the day.

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony continued to provide assistance for the physical and psychological rehabilitation of child victims of communal, caste, ethnic or terrorist, violence, with special reference to their care, education and training. The Foundation also promoted communal harmony, fraternity and national integration by providing $3.96 million (15.97-crore INR) in financial assistance to rehabilitate 8,849 minority children through December 2006. It has also given grants to states to hold events that promote communal harmony.

During the previous reporting period, the UPA introduced legislation to give New Delhi the power to intervene in states in which the Government refuses to take strong measures to end communal outbreaks. The UPA also acted to increase the powers of the human rights commission to investigate abuse cases. After its introduction in Parliament, the legislation was moved to a standing committee, where it remained throughout the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the NCERT acted systematically to remove "tainted" textbooks with communal bias from schools and introduce secular, more objective school textbooks that seriously examine atrocities committed against minorities in the country.

Speeches by the Prime Minister and some state government officials emphasized the need to build communal harmony and to work towards peaceful co-existence. In May 2007 the country celebrated the 150th anniversary of its first rebellion against British colonial rule with a year of events aimed at promoting communal harmony, a theme on which Prime Minister Manmohan Singh focused his speech in Parliament.

The NHRC and NCM continued to promote freedom of religion during the reporting period. Through their annual reports and investigations, they focused attention on human rights problems and, where possible, encouraged judicial resolutions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The country's population of 1.1 billion includes innumerable religious traditions; there were instances of societal discrimination and violence based in whole or in part on religion. Many such incidents were linked to politics, conversion, retaliation and/or revenge. Economic competition between different religious communities also played an important role in such conflicts. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs' 2006 Annual Report, there were 698 instances of communal violence or violence along religious lines in which 133 persons were killed and 2,170 injured.

Efforts at ecumenical understanding brought religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. Prominent secularists of all religious groups made public efforts to show respect for other religious groups by celebrating their holidays and attending social events such as weddings. Muslim groups protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organizations issued public statements condemning anti-Muslim violence in places such as Gujarat.

Members of all religious communities also spoke up against terrorism. In March 2006 one of India's leading Islamic seminaries issued a fatwa against terrorists targeting places of worship and killing innocent people. The imam ruled that "there was absolutely no room for terrorism in Islam and the murder of one innocent period amounted to the murder of the entire humanity."

Leaders of the Tibetan Buddhist community commented during the reporting period that relations with the Government and local residents were good, and that they did not believe the community to be persecuted.

In January 2007 in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh members of the Jain religion accused Muslims of destroying posters depicting a Jain saint. One person died of injuries sustained in skirmishes between the two communities.

According to media reports, on March 12, 2007, unidentified individuals allegedly chopped the hair and shaved the beard of a Sikh youth in Pune, Maharashtra, who was reported missing by his family several days earlier. The Sikh youth was found unconscious along the track near the Jagadhri railway station in Haryana. Although the police initiated an investigation, the case remains unresolved.

Approximately 4,778 Pandit families from Jammu and Kashmir still were living in 12 refugee camps in Jammu at the end of the reporting period, and 238 families were still in Delhi's 14 camps. The remainder of the more than 56,000 families who were driven from their homes by Muslim insurgents in 2002–2003 lived elsewhere.

There were instances of religiously motivated violence and sectarian rioting, including mob violence or vigilante action and Hindu-Muslim communal violence.

In March 2007 a Hindu color splashing procession (Rangteras') through a Muslim-dominated locality led to an incident of communal violence. Allegedly, the processionists raised inflammatory slogans and vandalized 26 shops belonging to Muslims. According to the Rajasthan Muslim Forum, the state police did not take any action to stop the violence and arrested all Muslims who attempted to file complaints against the rioters.

In February 2007 nine persons were injured in Hindu-Muslim clashes during the Moharrum procession in Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

On January 20–22, 2007, riots erupted in Bangalore after Muslim youth allegedly pulled down banners put up by Hindu activists. Clashes left a young boy dead, 31 individuals (mostly Muslims) injured, and at least 15 vehicles damaged. Media reports suggested that lack of clear orders prevented decisive police action against the rioters.

On September 29, 2006, during a procession in Nanded, Maharashtra, members of the Hindu student organization Chava damaged stalls selling Iftar food and stoned a mosque. Muslims alleged that the police remained passive while local police claimed they controlled the procession and arrested 30 Chava activists.

In September 2006 minor Hindu-Muslim skirmishes occurred in Rabodi (Thane city) and Osmanabad in Maharashtra during immersion processions of the Hindu deity Ganesha. Police acted promptly and brought the violence under control.

Although not decreed by fatwas, some Muslims attempted to impose their religious views concerning ethical and moral conduct on their fellow Muslims. On March 9, 2007, a 35-year-old woman was killed by local Muslim youth in Melapalayam, southern Tamil Nadu. The Media reported that the killing was due to her having an affair with a married man, which angered youth influenced by the Islamic fringe group "Al Umma." Tamil Nadu police arrested six individuals in connection with this killing.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of harassment of non-Christians in Christian majority areas or by Christian militant separatist movements.

The issue of conversion of Hindus or members of lower castes to Christianity remained highly sensitive and resulted in assaults and/or arrests of Christians. However, Christians often held large public prayer meetings without violence or protests. For example, hundreds of Christians participated in a program of nonstop devotional chants (akhand keertan) for 2 nights and days, from February 2–4, 2007, in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh.

According to faith-based organizations, including the AICC and the Christian Legal Association of India, there were at least 128 attacks against Christians in 2006.

Religious media reported that there were 20 reported acts of violence committed against Christians in Andra Pradesh during the reporting period. According to these reports, the Bajrang Dal and other Hindu extremist organizations physically assaulted pastors and congregants, destroyed and vandalized churches, attacked schools and accused Christians of engaging in unethical conversion activities and proselytizing. There were seven incidents in the same state during the last reporting period.

On April 11, 2007, Hindu extremists attacked Evangelical Christians in Chittor, Andhra Pradesh, physically assaulting some of the congregants, removing Christian literature and alleging that the Christians were engaged in unethical conversions. On February 20, 2007, Pastor Goda Israel, who was the overseer of 15 churches in Andhra Pradesh, died of stabbing wounds. According to reports, Pastor Goda received threats due to his proselytizing activities. On November 16, 2006, according to a Christian NGO, 30 extremists attacked a Christian school run by Roman Catholic nuns, damaging property and threatening the nuns with sexual humiliation. Allegedly, the incident stemmed from the nun's requirement that all students wear uniforms and not traditional Hindu clothing.

During the reporting period, faith-based media outlets reported at least 14 separate incidents of attacks on Christian prayer meetings or Christian individuals by

Hindu extremists in Chhattisgarh. There were four incidents of attacks during the previous reporting period. Christians alleged that Hindu groups, such as Dharm Sena (Religion Army) or the Dharm Raksha Sena (Religion Protection Army) (DRS), disrupted prayer meetings, assaulted pastors and laypersons, and confiscated and destroyed religious material. Christians also claimed that authorities filed false charges of conversion by force and allurement, and that the police was biased in how it registered complaints, doing so promptly only when the accused was a Christians.

On April 30, 2007, eight extremists attacked a U.S. businessman, in Raipur, Chhattisgarh accusing him of engaging in forced conversion and missionary activities in the area. He suffered serious injuries. Police attempted to arrest the perpetrators.

On February 25, 2007, a group of Hindu villagers of Surgi village in Rajanandgaon district forcefully ousted India Mission Church Pastor T.N. Jose from the village, forcing him to sign a statement that he was converting people to Christianity. The villagers also briefly held captive his sister, who runs a medical clinic in the village.

On December 24, 2006, Dharm Sena activists publicly protested against celebrating Christmas in the state capital Raipur. Reportedly, many Christians were intimidated by the campaign and did not attend Christmas services.

On December 17, 2006, around 50 DRS activists assaulted Pastor Philip Jagdella as he was returning from teaching Sunday school. He was accused of conversion by allurement and of distributing candy to Sunday school attendees. The activists took him to a police station and pressured the police to register a complaint against him "for hurting Hindu religious sentiments." The Chhattisgarh Christian Forum (CCF) interceded, and made the police register counter-complaints against the DRS for the beatings. The police also ordered a medical examination for Jagdella because of CCF advocacy. CCF noted that police normally fail to follow this procedure when Hindus assault Christians.

Gujarat religious media outlets described several attacks on Christians by Hindu groups during the reporting period. In November 2006 the Gujarat High Court heard a case against the Bhavnagar district administration, which had unsuccessfully tried to close down a Christian-run school in October 2006 for administrative lapses. At the end of the reporting period, the school was open and the court case ongoing. In October 2006 the Hindu leader of the Hindoliya village of Surat, Gujarat asked a Christian villager to demolish a house used for worship, prayer, and Bible study, alleging that forced conversions were taking place there. The man refused and the case was in the court at the end of the reporting period. In September 2006 Hindu extremists accused eight Christian activists of the Indian Missionary Society of firing a gun at Hindus and attempting to forcefully convert one of them. The Christians claimed that they were the victims of an assault by Hindus. Police arrested the Christians and subsequently, with the help of the Gujarat High Court, the Christians filed counter-complaints.

According to religious press outlets, there were four reports of acts of violence against Christians following the passage of an anti-conversion law in Himachal Pradesh in late December 2006. There were no reports during the previous reporting period. On January 21, 2007, a large number of VHP members allegedly harassed Pastor Timuhias Behal in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, accusing him of engaging in unethical conversions and demanding that he close down an orphanage, cease prayer meetings, and leave the area.

According to religious media, there were at least 40 reported acts of violence against Christians in the state of Karnataka, a considerable increase from the 6 incidents reported during the previous reporting period. Religious press reported injuries to pastors and congregants (males and females), threats and intimidation and destruction of property and places of worship. Attackers disrupted prayer meetings and Church services. On June 8, 2007, media reported that a mob of Hindu extremists, allegedly led by the Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, disrupted a Christian service in a suburb of Bangalore. Local police arrived but the pastor said he did not want to press charges. On March 28, 2007, Catholics in Mangalore protested against a series of attacks on the community by activists belonging to the RSS. On January 7, 2007, Hindu activists attacked a pastor and two of his parishioners in a Bangalore suburb. This was followed by another attack by the same activists on a prayer meeting conducted by a different pastor. Both pastors complained that the local police have been lax in dealing with their case. On November 30, 2006, approximately 50 members of the Bajrang Dal and VHP attacked the Avila Convent Catholic Girls' High School in Misore, Karnataka, physically assaulting staff and vandalizing property. Extremists also accused the

headmistress of engaging in unethical conversion during school hours. Allegedly, the police issued a warning to the headmistress.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Madhya Pradesh stated that between July 2006 and April 2007, it received reports of more than 55 attacks on Christians by various Hindu groups such as the Dharam Sena. Of these 55 incidents, 34 were in Jabalpur. The Conference members claimed that police often failed to file FIRs or to mention the names of Hindu perpetrators in the FIRs. Most attacks targeted private prayer meetings at houses of Christian worshippers. According to the 2001 census, 0.03 percent the state's population is Christian.

Religious media reported 20 acts of violence against Christians in Madhya Pradesh, 6 of which resulted in the arrest of Christians under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act. This compares to 12 attacks reported by the same sources during the previous reporting period. Reports also stated that Bajrang Dal members and other extremists attacked prayer meetings, church services, and church property, resulting in arrests, threats, harassment, serious injuries to pastors and congregants, and destruction of property. The police were often ineffective in arresting perpetrators of attacks.

On April 1, 2007, 30 Hindus led by Yogesh Agarwal of the Dharam Sena attacked Palm Sunday prayers at St. Paul's Church in Gokulpur, Jabalpur. Seven Christians were treated in a hospital for injuries; two Dharam Sena activists were also injured. Attackers allegedly assaulted the 7-year-old son of pastor James Masih. Police filed a complaint against the Dharam Sena. On the same day, Hindu extremists attacked a Christian Palm Sunday procession in Damoh District. According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), two Christians received severe head injuries and were treated at a mission hospital. EFI has not published the names of the victims, citing security concerns.

On March 31, 2007, a Hindu leader Snehlata Kedia reportedly claimed in a public lecture in Bhopal that Christian priests have sex with young Hindu girls under the pretext of hearing confessions. On March 16, 2007, two independent pastors were arrested by police in Chenapur, Khargone district, after local residents complained that the pastors were hurting their religious feelings. The pastors were distributing religious literature. On March 6, 2007, Hindu extremists also attacked Pastor Binoy Kuriakose and 10 of his team while they were distributing religious materials near Ratlam town. Also in March 2007, Hindu extremists attacked a Christian prayer meeting and assaulted Independent Church Pastor Avinash Kanchan and some of his followers. According to reports, Police stated that no one filed a complaint.

During the reporting period, faith-based religious media outlets reported several instances of violence against Christian prayer meetings or church property in Maharashtra. In all cases, police arrested the attackers who were later released on bail.

On March 31, 2007, Hindu extremists allegedly assaulted a Christian pastor during a prayer service in Ulhasnagar. Christian activists claimed that he was being falsely accused of forcible conversions. He suffered a fracture and head injuries, but no attackers were arrested. On March 3, 2007, a group of Hindus assaulted two Christian youths distributing prayer tracts at a suburban railway station in Mumbai. The attackers stole the printed material, dragged the youths to the police station, and registered a complaint alleging denigration of other religious beliefs and forcible conversions. Police sent the youths to a hospital for medical examination and treatment. On February 19, 2007, a mob injured five Bible College students while distributing prayer tracts and literature. Christian activists claimed that the attackers had tacit support from the police. The youths were reportedly denied treatment at a Government hospital.

According to religious media, there were nine reported acts of violence against Christians in Orissa. This compares with four incidents reported during the previous reporting period. Some of the affected pastors and congregants were seeking legal redress. On March 5, 2007, the AICC (Orissa Chapter) reported that Christians in Ranalai village, Gajapati, Orissa, were attacked by Hindus. The Council appealed to the administration to provide police protection to the Christian community and take appropriate action against the suspects. On February 28, 2007, approximately 400 people attacked a Gospel for Asia Bible school in Jharsuguda, Orissa, physically assaulting staff and students. On October 4, 2006, Hindu extremists abducted, tonsured, and tortured a convert to Christianity. Reportedly, he was forced to reconvert to Hinduism. This incident happened 2 days after the VHP reconverted 129 tribal Christians to Hinduism.

Religious media reported eight acts of violence against Christians in Rajasthan during the reporting period. The same sources reported numerous incidents of severe attacks against Christian property or persons during the previous period. In May 2007 media reported on a trend in Rajasthan in which Christians were threat-

ened, followed by violence. For example, on April 29, 2007, a national television channel filmed the attack of independent pastor Walter Masih at his home in Nandipuri. The assailants were reportedly associated with the VHP and its youth wing Bajrang Dal. Police arrested seven people, including Government employee and VHP officer Virendra Singh. According to religious press outlets, on May 12, 2007, approximately 15 individuals attacked the home of a Catholic priest, ordering him to leave the premises and accusing him of engaging in unethical conversions. On April 29, 2007, members of the VHP and Bajrang Dal allegedly attacked a church service held in the house of Pastor Walter Massey, physically assaulting him and vandalizing his property. Television channels and the national press reported the attack. Police arrested five individuals.

There were several instances of interreligious intolerance regarding marriage. In April 2007 after a Sindhi Hindu female minor eloped with a Muslim minor, the Sindhi Hindu community of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, tried unsuccessfully to ban young Sindhi girls from using two-wheelers and cell-phones. Following the elopement, the Bajrang Dal announced plans to form a Hindu Kanya Raksha Samiti (Hindu Daughters' Protection Committee) to prevent the recurrence of such incidents. Print media reported that for the last several years, Bhopal Police have kept tabs on the number of interfaith marriages in the city (especially in cases when the groom is Muslim). Reportedly Hindu nationalist organizations cited police statistics, pointing to an increasing number of interfaith marriages as evidence of a purported Muslim conspiracy to "steal" Hindu girls.

In April 2007 after a Hindu female minor eloped with a Muslim man in Gujarat, the VHP announced that it would conduct a door-to-door survey of out-of-state migrant youths to "protect" Hindu girls. The Mumbai police subsequently arrested and charged the man with kidnapping and sent the girl to a home for minors. A Hindu Right group attacked the offices of a national TV channel, causing property damage, after the channel aired the couple's story.

In April 2007 DRS members damaged the Star News office in Mumbai, protesting the channel's report of an interfaith couple from Surat, Gujarat that fled to Mumbai to escape parental disapproval of their marriage. Also during the reporting period, several inter-faith couples from Ahmedabad, Gujarat (Hindu brides with either Christian or Muslim grooms) alleged in a series of media interviews that a Hindu nationalist group took action against them. The couples claimed that the group (often with the connivance of the girls' parents) abducted the girls and tried to marry them off to Hindu grooms. Reportedly, several interfaith couples fled from Gujarat to protect themselves and to marry according to their own wishes.

In January 2007 local Dharma Sena activists unsuccessfully tried to prevent a Christian man from marrying a tribal woman. Though the couple gave a notice under the Special Marriages Act in October 2006, the Jabalpur district administration held repeated hearings to hear objections by Dharma Sena activists, who alleged that the girl was being lured with money, and would be compelled to convert to Christianity.

In 2006 the Government of Madhya Pradesh (GOMP) education department relocated a girls' college from a Muslim to a Hindu neighborhood, purportedly to reduce chances of fraternization amongst Hindu girls and Muslim boys. The GOMP allegedly was responding to pressure from the VHP and Bajrang Dal. The GOMP cited administrative reasons for the move. Muslims claimed that that enrollment of Muslim girls in the college dropped as a result.

There were acts of vandalism against religious properties during the reporting period. On April 4, 2007, approximately 300 individuals from the Sangh Parivar and RSS reportedly demolished an Evangelical Lutheran Church and vandalized the pastor's property in Orissa. On February 28, 2007, a group of Hindus attacked the Believers' Church Bible College campus at Jharsuguda, Orissa. According to the AICC (Orissa Chapter), the attackers entered the premises, beat up students and staff, and ransacked property. An altercation between the students of the college and the inhabitants of a nearby village may have led to the attack. Armed police were deployed in the area following the incident, and a FIR was lodged with the Brajarajnagar police station. On February 22, 2007, a group of Hindus demolished a church building under construction in Bhubaneswar, Orissa. The police filed an FIR. In November 2006 alleged Hindu activists carried out an arson attack on a Catholic Church in Dharwad, Karnataka. Church authorities claimed police apathy in providing protection to the community. The church property suffered no damages.

No major attacks on churches, temples, or mosques were reported in Tamil Nadu between August 2006 and March 2007. However, incidents of tension around churches, particularly new ones, were not rare. The AICC reported that on December 5, 2006, a group of Hindus disrupted a worship service at a prayer hall in

Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, because the church was located in close proximity to a temple. Reportedly, the local police advised the pastor to call off the worship service.

There were instances of discrimination against members of religious groups with respect to land transfers. In April 2007 the Chhattisgarh chapters of the RSS and BJP held a major rally in Raipur to protest the transfer or purchase of land by Christian tribal groups. Faith-based organizations alleged that the Chhattisgarh Government, at the behest of local Hindu leader BJP MP Dilipsinh Judeo, deliberately lodged false cases against Christian tribals who had bought land for Church activities. The same groups maintained that during the reporting period, Mr. Judeo organized several "Ghar-wapasi" (homecoming) programs to allegedly "reconvert" Christian tribals to Hinduism in Jashpur, Chhattisgarh. In most of these programs, tribals, regardless of whether or not they attended Christian prayer meetings, were "sanctified" by Judeo. Faith-based organizations claimed that tribals are animists and not Hindus, and that the rituals are tantamount to a "conversion" to Hinduism.

The Andra Pradesh Federation of Churches, an apex body of Catholic, Protestant, and other Christian denominations, demanded exemption from proposed legislation of the State Government to control church properties.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reported attacks against the media by ethnic and religious groups during the reporting period.

Discrimination based on caste is officially illegal but remains prevalent, especially in rural areas. With more job opportunities in the private sector and better chances of upward social mobility, the country has begun a quiet social transformation in this area. However, in rural areas, caste remains a major impediment to social advancement, and low-caste Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh Dalits continue to face class and race discrimination as a result. Some Dalits who seek to convert out of a desire to escape discrimination and violence have encountered hostility and backlash from upper castes. Ultimately, caste is a complex issue entrenched in society and the Government has taken steps to address it.

Despite Government measures, the practice of dedicating Devadasis reportedly continued in several southern states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devadasis are young, generally prepubescent girls who are dedicated to a Hindu deity or temple as "servants of god." They may not marry, must live apart from their families, and are required to provide sexual services to priests and others. Reportedly, many Devadasis eventually are sold to urban brothels. The Devadasi tradition is linked, to some degree, to both trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS. 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. Estimates of Devadasis in the country varied; in Karnataka, media sources reported as few as 23,000 and as many as 100,000. The Department of Women and Child Welfare, Government of Karnataka, estimates 15–20,000 Devadasis in the state.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy and the three U.S. Consulates continued to promote religious freedom through discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The Embassy and consulates regularly met with religious leaders, and reported on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

The U.S. Government supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious and communal tolerance and freedom. Members of the Embassy community celebrated Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals throughout the reporting period with members of the various religious communities.

The Embassy repeatedly expressed concern over Himachal Pradesh's "anti-conversion" legislation with high ranking officials of the state and national Governments.

Throughout the reporting period, mission officers investigated and reported on numerous cases of alleged religious persecution, the reported harassment of EMI by the Rajasthan Government, discrimination against Dalits, and religiously motivated attacks by militants and terrorists.

Mission officers also monitored the plight of internally displaced Kashmiri Hindus, known as Pandits, who fled their home areas in the valley of Kashmir starting in 1989 due to attacks on them by terrorists seeking to drive out non-Muslim minorities.

Embassy officers regularly met with the NHRC General Secretary and other Commission officers regarding actions by the State Government that have been injurious to the free exercise of belief by religious minorities.

During the reporting period, Embassy and consulate officials met with leaders of all significant minority communities to discuss religious freedom concerns. In April 2006 the Calcutta Consulate organized a conference on "Perspectives on Islamic

Education in the Twenty-First Century." Madrassah teachers attended the program and discussed topics including education, religion and public policy, new directions in Madrassah education in the country, and education and women in Islam.

The NGO and missionary communities in the country were extremely active on questions of religious freedom, and mission officers meet regularly with local NGOs.

The U.S. Government continued to express regret over the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, and urged all parties in Gujarat to resolve their differences peacefully. Consulate and senior Embassy officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the Gujarat violence. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates reached out to madrassahs directly and through the special International Visitor Madrassah programs; religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for diversity were topics of discussion.

KAZAKHSTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the various religious communities worship largely without Government interference. Local officials attempt on occasion to limit the practice of religion by some nontraditional groups; however, higher-level officials or courts occasionally intervene to correct such attempts.

There was no change in the legal status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, but the Government's enforcement of previously amended laws led to increased problems for some unregistered groups. The law on religion continues to impose mandatory registration requirements on missionaries and religious organizations. Most religious groups, including minority and nontraditional denominations, reported that the religion laws did not materially affect religious activities. Unregistered religious groups experienced an increase in the level of fines imposed for nonregistration in addition to stronger efforts to collect such fines. Most registered groups experienced no problems, but the Hare Krishna movement, a registered group, suffered the demolition of 25 homes as part of the Karasai local government's campaign to seize title to its land based on alleged violations of property laws.

The population maintained its long tradition of secularism and tolerance. In particular, Muslim, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Jewish leaders reported high levels of acceptance in society. During the reporting period, the dominant Islamic and Russian Orthodox leaders publicly criticized a number of nontraditional religious groups. The number of registered religious groups and places of worship increased during the year for virtually all religious groups, including minority and nontraditional groups.

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 supported the country's efforts to increase links and mutual understanding among religious groups. U.S. officials engaged in private and public dialogue at all levels to urge that proposed amendments to the religion laws are consistent with the country's constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and with the country's tradition of religious tolerance. U.S. Government officials visited religious facilities, met with religious leaders, and worked with Government officials to address specific cases of concern. During the reporting period, the Embassy sponsored exchange programs for leaders of various religious groups to meet with a diverse range of counterparts in the United States. Embassy officials maintained an ongoing dialogue with a broad range of groups within the religious community.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,052,540 square miles, and a population of 15.4 million, according to Government statistics released in February 2007. The society is ethnically diverse, and many religious groups are represented. Due in part to the country's nomadic and Soviet past, many residents describe themselves as nonbelievers. Several researchers reported and surveys suggested low levels of religious conviction and worship attendance. The Government maintains statistics on the number of registered congregations and organizations but does not keep statistics on the size of each group. The most recent reliable statistics on religious affiliation came from the 1999 census. Although there was a large increase in the number of minority religious congregations registered since 1999, the Government believes that percentages of the population belonging to particular religious groups have remained consistent.

Ethnic Kazakhs, who constitute just over half of the population, and ethnic Uzbeks, Uighurs, and Tatars, who collectively comprise less than 10 percent, are historically Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school. Other Islamic groups that account for less than 1 percent of the population, include Shafi'i Sunni (traditionally associated with Chechens), Shi'a, Sufi, and Ahmadi. The highest concentration of self-identified practicing Muslims is located in the southern region bordering Uzbekistan.

Sizeable populations of ethnic Russians and smaller populations of ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Belarusians, are Russian Orthodox by tradition; together they constitute approximately one-third of the population. There were 268 registered Russian Orthodox churches. An estimated 1.5 percent of the population is ethnic German, many of whom are Roman Catholic or Lutheran.

Members of a Roman Catholic archdiocese include many ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Germans and account for 2 percent of the population. The Government reported 82 registered Roman Catholic churches and affiliated organizations throughout the country, and 166 foreign Roman Catholic clergy and missionaries. A smaller, affiliated community of Greek Catholics, many of whom are ethnic Ukrainians, had three registered churches and seven foreign priests and missionaries.

According to Government statistics, Protestant Christian congregations outnumber Russian Orthodox or Roman Catholic congregations, although it is unlikely that Protestant Christians account for a larger number of adherents. The Government reported 953 registered "nontraditional" Protestant Christian churches and 145 affiliated foreign missionaries during the reporting period.

There are two Baptist groups in the country, the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists ("Council of Churches") and the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists ("Union of Baptists"). Although there were no precise statistics available on the Council of Churches, religious observers estimated up to 1,000 adherents, while Union of Baptists adherents number more than 10,000. The Government reported 232 registered Union of Baptists groups during the reporting period.

Other Christian religious groups with a sizable number of congregations include Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Pentecostals, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists. Smaller communities of Methodists, Mennonites, and Mormons are also registered.

A Jewish community, estimated at well below 1 percent of the population, has synagogues in Almaty, Astana, Ust-Kamenogorsk, and Pavlodar. Rabbis in Almaty reported an increase in attendance for both services and religious education during the reporting period.

Government statistics indicated 44 registered nontraditional religious groups during the reporting period, including affiliates of the Hare Krishna movement, the Baha'is, Christian Scientists, and the Unification Church. The Government also reported four registered Buddhist groups throughout the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and religious groups worshiped largely without Government interference; however, local and regional officials attempted, on occasion, to limit or control the practice of religion by several groups, especially nontraditional religious communities. The Constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides the right to decline religious affiliation. The Government continued to express publicly its support for religious tolerance and diversity.

The Government's religion laws narrow the legal protections of religious freedom found in the Constitution. The laws were amended in 2005 to reinforce registration requirements and clarify that religious groups must register with both the central Government and the local governments of individual regions (oblasts) in which they have congregations. Prior to these amendments, the Government required religious organizations to register only if they wished to be accorded legal status in order to buy or rent property, hire employees, or engage in other legal transactions. Although the amended national religion laws explicitly require religious organizations to register with the Government, it continues to provide that all persons are free to practice their religion "alone or together with others." To register, a religious organization must have at least ten members and submit an application to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

The Government may deny registration based upon an insufficient number of adherents or inconsistencies between the provisions of a religious organization's charter and the law. In addition, under the Law on Public Associations, a registered or-

ganization, including a religious group, may have all activities suspended by court order for a period of 3 to 6 months for defiance of the Constitution or laws or for systematic pursuit of activities that contradict the charter and bylaws of the organization as registered. Police, procurators, and citizens may petition a court to suspend the activities of a registered organization for failure to rectify violations or for repeated violations of the law. During a suspension, the organization concerned is prohibited from speaking with the media on behalf of the organization; holding meetings, gatherings, or services; and undertaking financial transactions other than meeting ongoing contractual obligations such as paying salaries.

In practice, most religious communities choose to register with the Government and are ultimately successful in obtaining registration. Nontraditional religious groups sometimes reported long delays in the process. When refusing or significantly delaying registration, the Government usually claimed that religious groups' charters did not meet the requirements of the law, in some cases citing discrepancies between Russian and Kazakh language versions of a group's charter or referring a charter for expert examination. Officials in Northern Kazakhstan and Atyrau Oblasts were cited by several groups as being resistant to working with nontraditional groups seeking registration.

Administrative Code Article 375 allows authorities to suspend the activities and fine the leaders of unregistered groups; Article 374–1, a related provision added to the Administrative Code by the July 2005 national security amendments, carries significantly heavier fines than Article 375. Local authorities have broad discretion in determining whether to file charges for unregistered religious activity under Article 375 or 374–1. Local governments unevenly applied these laws during the reporting period.

The Religious Issues Committee (RIC), which operates within the MOJ, serves as a liaison between religious groups and the Government. In addition, the RIC serves as a consultative body within the MOJ to facilitate the registration of religious groups. The RIC also provides expert testimony to courts on religious issues, reviews religious materials obtained by law enforcement officials in their investigations, and coordinates with law enforcement officials to monitor compliance with the registration requirements.

As in previous years, Government officials frequently expressed concern regarding the potential spread of political and religious extremism in the country. The Committee for National Security (KNB) has characterized the fight against "religious extremism" as a top priority of the internal intelligence service. An extremism law that came into effect in February 2005 applies to religious groups and other organizations. Under this law, the Government has broad latitude in identifying and designating a group as an extremist organization, banning a designated group's activities, and criminalizing membership in a banned organization. By the end of the reporting period, the Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) political movement remained the only group banned under the law. No apolitical religious organizations in the country had been outlawed as extremist.

The elections law prohibits political parties based upon ethnic, gender, or religious affiliation.

The Spiritual Association of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), a national organization with close ties to the Government, is headed by the chief Mufti in Almaty and exercises significant influence over the practice of Islam in the country, including the construction of mosques. The SAMK is the primary coordinator of hajj travel and authorizes travel agencies to provide hajj travel services to citizens. Religious observers reported that the SAMK occasionally pressured nonaligned imams and congregations to join the SAMK to ensure liturgical orthodoxy. Notwithstanding SAMK influence and pressure, during the reporting period, the Government registered some mosques and Muslim communities unaffiliated with the SAMK.

Neither law nor regulation prohibits foreign missionary activity. Foreign missionaries, like all visitors, are required to register with the migration police and indicate the purpose of their stay. Local and foreign missionaries are also required to register annually with the MOJ and provide information on religious affiliation, territory of missionary work, and time period for conducting that work. All literature and other materials to be used to support missionary work must be provided with the registration application; use of materials not vetted during the registration process is illegal. In addition a missionary must produce registration documents from the sponsoring religious organization and power of attorney from the sponsoring organization to be allowed to work on its behalf. The MOJ may refuse registration to missionaries whose work would be inconsistent with the law, including laws prohibiting the incitement of interethnic or interreligious hatred. The Constitution requires foreign religious associations to conduct their activities, including appointing the heads of religious associations, "in coordination with appropriate state institu-

tions." Foreigners are permitted under the law to register religious organizations; however, the Government requires that the majority of the ten founders of the organization be local citizens.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Homeschooling is permitted only for children at the preschool level, for noncitizen children, for children who want an accelerated curriculum, and for children who cannot attend public schools for family or health reasons. Homeschooled children must take intermediate and public exams at a public school. Parents may enroll children in supplemental religious education classes provided by registered religious organizations.

Under the national religion law, religious training of a child shall not cause damage to a child's all-around development or physical or moral health. The laws do not clarify how such damage should be assessed or which agency would make such a determination. Current educational licensing regulations do not permit religious groups to educate children without approval from the Ministry of Education. In accordance with the regulations, a religious organization whose charter includes provisions for religious education may be denied registration if it does not obtain approval from the Ministry of Education.

The Government exempted registered religious organizations from taxes on both church collections and income from certain religious activities. However, congregations are required to pay for services such as fire company protection for religious buildings. The Government has donated buildings, land, and provided other assistance for the construction of new mosques, synagogues, and Russian Orthodox churches.

Procurators have the right to inspect annually all organizations registered with state bodies; there were few reports that these inspections, when they occurred, were overly intrusive or were considered harassment. Where religious groups operated as legal entities, such as by running collective farms and restaurants or operating orphanages, authorities conducted health, sanitation, and other inspections relevant to the nature of the entities' operations. Authorities conducted public safety inspections of premises used for religious worship to ensure compliance with building and fire codes. These inspections also provided authorities with information about the registration status of the groups being inspected.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

No apolitical religious groups are banned in Kazakhstan.

The Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) Islamist political movement remained banned under the extremism law. Because HT is primarily a political organization, albeit one motivated by religious ideology, and because it does not condemn terrorist acts by other groups, authorities' actions to restrict HT and prosecute its members are not a restriction on religious freedom per se.

The national Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center reported that it had generally positive relations with the Government and the freedom to conduct their activities. However, the group experienced some registration difficulties and alleged several incidents of harassment by local governments. Although local Jehovah's Witnesses organizations are registered at the national level, in Astana and Almaty, and in 13 (of 14) oblasts, the center has attempted unsuccessfully since 2001 to register in Atyrau Oblast. The Atyrau regional procurator's office maintained that the group has consistently failed to comply with registration laws. The group submitted its most recent application on March 6, 2007. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the MOJ suspended the registration process on March 16, and forwarded the documents to Astana for expert examination, as in previous applications. On May 6, Atyrau police and procurators disrupted a gathering of Jehovah's Witnesses, videotaped participants and seized worship materials. The procurator filed an administrative case against six Jehovah's Witnesses for conducting religious activities without registration. On June 4, the local court imposed fines on the participants. The Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the decision, but on June 25 the oblast level court rejected the appeal without explanation.

The Government remains wary of religious extremism and actively discourages affiliation with extremist groups. However, human rights observers and members of some minority religious groups criticized the Government's often broad definition of extremism and its efforts to discourage affiliation with nontraditional groups. On October 10, 2006, the President signed a decree establishing a State Program on Patriotic Education of Citizens of Kazakhstan. Among other things, the decree warned against "the increasing activation of nontraditional religious associations and extremist organizations in Kazakhstan aimed first and foremost at attraction of young people." The decree cited the Hare Krishnas and Jehovah's Witnesses as examples

of nontraditional groups and Hizb ut-Tahrir as an example of an extremist organization.

On September 15, 2006, the deputy chief commander of the KNB Counter-Terrorism Center stated in a press interview that the KNB was drafting legislative proposals to address so-called destructive sects and organizations. He named the Grace Church, Scientologists, and Jehovah's Witnesses as organizations that should be banned.

Also during the reporting period, the MOJ distributed a brochure designed to help citizens "avoid the influence" of religious sects. The Russian language section of the brochure warned against proselytizers and Bible studies and provided tips to avoid the influence of nontraditional religious groups. The Kazakh language section broadly criticized "foreign religious confessions" and declared that a Kazakh who becomes involved with a religious sect "betray[s] his/her faith and motherland." The Kazakh text specifically warned against Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Ahmadis, and Hizb ut-Tahrir. The Jehovah's Witnesses objected to the brochure after learning that public school teachers in the Pavlodar region distributed it to their students in October 2006. The RIC reported that the brochure was produced by another section of the MOJ without the RIC's authorization, and was no longer in production. The brochure was reportedly distributed through public legal advice centers, but the RIC was unable to confirm how many brochures were printed or where they were distributed.

In March 2007 Jehovah's Witness centers throughout the country rented local halls and rooms for an April 2, 2007, religious ceremony, and distributed fliers inviting citizens to the event. However, in several cities including Kyzylorda, Shaktinsk, Shymkent, and Taraz, the landlords called the Jehovah's Witnesses shortly before the event and canceled the reservation. The Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that the landlords were pressured by local government officials. In Semipalatinsk, the Jehovah's Witnesses and their guests arrived on April 2 to find their rented space surrounded by firefighters. A local government representative claimed that they needed a permit for the ceremony and denied them admission to their rented room. In each case, the Jehovah's Witnesses were able to hold their ceremony in other locations. No other religious groups reported similar instances of Government interference in their public gatherings.

There were reports that local representatives of the KNB or police officials disrupted religious meetings in private homes during the period covered by this report. Several groups reported that local law enforcement representatives attended their services, although their presence generally was not considered disruptive.

The Baptist Council of Churches has a policy of not seeking or accepting registration in former Soviet countries, and church members criticized the intrusive nature of the registration process for requiring information about ethnicity, family status, religious education, employment, and political affiliation. During the reporting period the Council of Churches noted several court cases against churchgoers throughout the country for participating in the activities of an unregistered group.

The Karasai regional government near Almaty continued a campaign to seize title to land used by the Hare Krishna movement. Following the Supreme Court's August 24, 2006, denial of the Hare Krishna's appeal, the RIC formed a special commission to resolve the issue and promised that no further action would be taken against the commune until the commission completed its work. Some participants described the commission as disorganized and subjective; Hare Krishna leaders alleged it was created merely to deflect criticism of the Government on the eve of the Congress of World and Traditional Religions, which took place in the country in September 2006.

On November 21, 2006, with little notice to residents, Karasai district officials arrived at the commune with court orders, bulldozers, trucks, and riot police. Authorities blocked access to the commune, cut electricity, and demolished multiple homes, destroying possessions and leaving homeowners without shelter or compensation. The police beat several Hare Krishnas and arrested at least one resident who protested the action. The police attempted to bar observers from the process. The demolitions occurred without the knowledge of the RIC and before the special commission released its results.

On December 22, 2006, the commission released its decision, which did not effectively clarify the situation or move the parties toward a resolution. In public statements following the decision Government officials stated that the Hare Krishnas were in violation of various land-use laws and were not victims of religious discrimination.

Karasai district officials continued their legal actions against the Hare Krishna properties throughout the winter and spring of 2007. Government officials in Astana, including the RIC and the human rights ombudsman, pledged to resolve the

situation through dialogue, including a possible agreement to provide the Hare Krishnas with an alternate property. Nonetheless, on June 15, 2007, Karasai district officials again brought a demolition crew to the commune and destroyed an additional 12 homes, destroying many possessions and leaving the residents homeless. At the end of the reporting period, the situation remained tense and unresolved, and the Hare Krishnas continued to allege judicial violations by local officials and unresponsiveness on the part of the Government.

Although many observers believed the Karasai district government's actions were motivated primarily by a financial interest in the land, the Hare Krishnas claimed the local government targeted them because they are a nontraditional religious community. Local officials criticized the Hare Krishnas as an illegitimate and threatening religious group. In an April 25, 2006, television interview, a local official from the Karasai akimat stated that the Hare Krishnas were dangerous for the country and "not accepted as a religion."

In addition only homes owned by Hare Krishnas were targeted for demolition, though the Hare Krishnas claimed that other homeowners faced similar legal circumstances. The Government characterized the issue as a legal dispute, noting a series of court rulings that the land should revert to the Karasai regional government, because the farmer from whom Hare Krishna followers had purchased the land in 1999 did not hold title, and thus the land had not been properly privatized.

Observers believe that security officials informally monitor some religious activity, particularly imams' sermons; however, it has not been reported that any monitoring had the character of interference or harassment.

Although in the previous reporting period the Ahmadi Muslim community reported difficulties in obtaining visas and registration for a foreign missionary and his family, the community reported no problems during the reporting period, and was successful in extending the visa of their missionary.

On October 23, 2006, the Ust-Kamenogorsk city administrative court convicted a foreign citizen of violating the terms of his business visa for giving a lecture at a legally registered Protestant church. The foreign citizen was an administrator at a local university and had attended the church for many years. The court imposed a 41,200 tenge ($322) fine and ordered his deportation. On November 14, 2006, the appeals court upheld the fine but eliminated the deportation penalty, contingent on the defendant leaving the country voluntarily.

According to media reports, migration officials in the city of Kyzylorda refused to extend the visa of South Korean pastor Kim U Sob after he was convicted in June 2006 of conducting missionary work without registration. Kim was charged after police raided the home of a church member he was visiting outside the city limits of Kyzylorda. Kim's registration was only valid for work within the city limits. Kim was forced to leave the country on November 14, 2006.

Several religious groups, including unregistered Baptists, the Grace Church, Hare Krishnas, and Jehovah's Witnesses, reported that they had been the subject of news accounts portraying nontraditional religious groups as a threat to security or society. Some of the news accounts appeared in Government-controlled media.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

As in the previous reporting period, there were no reports of prolonged detention of members of religious organizations for proselytizing. On occasion, authorities took action against individuals engaged in proselytizing who were not registered as missionaries; however, such actions were limited to the confiscation of religious literature, fines, brief detentions, and deportation.

In February 2007, Northern Kazakhstan Oblast authorities conducted a preventative sweep entitled "Operation Religious Extremism" which resulted in the arrest of eight pastors and church leaders for violating religious registration laws. The authorities claimed that the operation was part of a larger CIS-wide program to combat terrorism and violent extremism. In most of the cases, Baptist and evangelical Christian church leaders were prosecuted and fined.

When individuals were found to be guilty of violating Article 374 or 375 of the administrative code, courts imposed a fine. Council of Churches members usually refused to pay fines levied by courts for nonregistration. Church members reported that, unlike previous years, courts began enforcing payment of fines in a few cases, including by seizing property and garnishing wages. In one case during the reporting period, authorities imposed a 3-day jail sentence against a pastor in the city of Shymkent.

According to media reports, members of the unregistered Tabligh Jamaat movement, an Islamic missionary group, also faced detentions and fines for conducting religious activities without registration. In September 2006 Aktau authorities fined several Tabligh members for proselytizing in a mosque in the village of Kyzyl-Tobe.

In October 2006 police arrested six members of the group in the city of Ekibastuz for delivering a theological lecture at a local mosque, and fined the leader of the group.

As part of its campaign to seize title to land used by the Hare Krishna movement, the Karasai local government outside Almaty forcibly demolished 13 Hare Krishna homes on November 21, 2006, and another 12 homes on June 15, 2007. Several Hare Krishna members were beaten in the November 21 action. For further details and context, see the Restrictions section.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

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.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In September 2006, President Nazarbayev hosted the second Congress of World and Traditional Religions in Astana, a gathering devoted to strengthening understanding between world cultures, religious groups, and ethnic groups and preventing conflicts based on cultural and religious differences. The event was highly publicized in the country, and included representatives of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Taoism, Shinto, and other international religious organizations.

Nazarbayev regularly made public statements highlighting and praising the country's tradition of interethnic and interfaith tolerance, and remains engaged with international religious leaders and communities. On April 8, 2007, the President gave a nationally televised address during the Easter services of the Orthodox Church in Astana, declaring that "[i]nter-ethnic and inter-faith peace rules in Kazakhstan. We celebrate Islamic Kurban-ait, Christian Easter and the holidays of other religious groups equally, because we never forget the great truth common to all mankind: we have one God and everybody follows his or her own way to God."

According to Government statistics, the number of religious groups rose steadily over the last few years. In April 2007 there were 3,855 groups, compared with 3,420 in 2006 and 3,259 in 2005. The Union of Baptists, for example, grew from 254 registered affiliated groups in 2003 to 319 in 2007.

The Government made efforts to promote religious tolerance in its ranks. Human rights training provided to law enforcement officers by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in cooperation with the Government included information on religious rights under the law.

There were no reports of incidents of anti-Semitism committed by the Government. The leadership of the Jewish community consistently praised the Government for its proactive protection of the Jewish community. As in previous reporting periods, leaders of the Jewish community reported no cases of anti-Semitism either by the Government or in society.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The country is multiethnic, with a long tradition of tolerance and secularism. Since independence, the number of mosques and churches has increased greatly. However, the population, particularly in rural areas, is sometimes wary of nontraditional religious groups.

In mid-December 2006, the *Megapolis* weekly newspaper published interviews with a representative of the SAMK and a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church. Both clergymen favored tightening Kazakhstan's policy against nontraditional religious groups and called for legislative changes to prevent so-called destructive sects and to strengthen the privileged status of the two major religious groups—Islam and Orthodox Christianity. The Russian Orthodox priest stated that nontraditional religious groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Pentecostals, Hare Krishnas, and Scientologists have no historical role in Kazakhstan, and criticized their "destructive work" in the country.

Members of the extremist Hizb ut-Tahrir political movement continued to print and distribute leaflets that supported anti-Semitism, among other beliefs.

Leaders of the four traditional religious groups, Islam, Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism, reported general acceptance and tolerance that was not always enjoyed by other minority religious groups. During the reporting period, there were no reports that mistrust of minority religious groups led to violence.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials emphasized that bilateral cooperation on economic and security matters is a complement to, not a substitute for, meaningful progress on human rights, including religious freedom. The Ambassador and Embassy officers remained engaged in dialogue with the Government to seek assurance that proposed legislation concerning religious freedom be drafted through a transparent legislative process, and that it reflect the country's international commitments to respect individuals' rights to peaceful expressions of religion.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officials coordinated with other Embassies and international human rights organizations to encourage the Government to seek legal expert assistance from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) in drafting legislation that had implications for the religious community.

On November 30, 2006, the Embassy released a statement expressing concern over the Karasai district authorities' aggressive campaign against the Hare Krishna commune outside of Almaty, including the demolition of several homes. The statement called for a fair and peaceful resolution of the ongoing legal dispute, and drew significant Government and media attention.

Embassy and U.S. Department of State officials visited houses of worship, met with religious leaders, and worked with Government officials to address specific cases of concern.

The Embassy maintained contact with a broad range of religious communities and reported on violations of their constitutional and human rights. Department of State officials met with Government officials and members of faith-based groups in the country. Embassy personnel consistently raised cases of local harassment with government authorities, who generally worked to resolve these cases, and ensure an equitable application of the law. Senior U.S. Government officials met with senior Government officials to raise religious freedom concerns. Embassy officials worked to connect religious communities with in-country legal resources to assist with registration concerns.

Embassy officials regularly attended public events in support of the religious community, in addition to participating in roundtables and other public debates on matters of religious freedom and tolerance. U.S. Government representatives in the country and in Washington were in regular contact with NGOs that followed religious freedom topics, including the Almaty Helsinki Committee and the Kazakhstan Bureau of International Human Rights and Rule of Law. On September 11, 2006, the Embassy hosted a well-publicized interfaith appeal for tolerance and observance for victims of terrorism, with leaders from a variety of religious groups.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy conducted exchange programs for religious leaders and human rights observers. Through the Community Connections Program, several religious leaders and local government officials traveled to the United States in January 2007 to examine religion in a secular society. The participants studied how religious communities in the United States interact with the state and how the state guarantees the rights of religious believers.

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, the Government restricted the activities of radical Islamic groups that it considered threats to stability and security and hampered or refused the registration of some Christian churches. The Constitution provides for the separation of religion and state, and it prohibits discrimination based on religion or religious beliefs. The Government did not officially support any religion; however, a May 6, 2006 decree recognized Islam and Russian Orthodoxy as "traditional 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 monitor and restrict Islamist groups that it considered to be threats to security. Some Christian groups continued to face delays in registration. The State Agency for Religious Affairs (SARA), formerly called the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA), is responsible for promoting religious tolerance, protecting freedom of conscience, and overseeing laws on religion. All religious organizations, including schools, must apply for approval of registration from SARA.

Although most religious groups and sects operated with little interference from the Government or each other, there were several cases of societal abuse based on religious beliefs and practices. There was an increase in tensions between Muslims and former Muslims who had converted to other religious groups. In one case, a mob upset at a Baptist pastor's conversions of Muslims to Christianity publicly beat the pastor and burned his Bibles and religious literature (see section 3).

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 status of the draft law on religion and maintained contact with Government officials regarding religious affairs. The U.S. Government sponsored lectures, discussions and exchanges to promote awareness of international religious freedom standards, religious tolerance, and the interaction between religious groups and the state. Embassy representatives met with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups, and with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that monitor religious freedom. The Ambassador frequently participated in outreach activities to various religious groups and promoted tolerance among the various religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 77,181 square miles, and a population of 5.2 million. Data from the National Statistics Committee indicated the following ethnic breakdown: Kyrgyz, 67 percent; Uzbeks, 14.2 percent; Russians, 10.3 percent; Dungans (ethnic Chinese Muslims), 1.1 percent; Uighurs (ethnic Turkic Muslims), 1 percent; and other ethnicities, 6 percent.

Islam is the most widely held faith. Official sources estimated that 80 percent of the population is Muslim. Almost all the Muslims are Sunni; there are few Shi'a in the country (approximately 1,000). According to SARA, as of May 2007 there were 1,650 mosques, of which 1,623 were registered. There also were seven institutes for higher Islamic teaching. According to recent official estimates, 11 percent of the population is Russian Orthodox, although some experts believe the figure could be as low as 8 percent. The country has 44 Russian Orthodox churches, 1 Russian Orthodox monastery for women, and 1 parochial school.

Other religious groups account for a very small percentage of the population. The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates 30 churches throughout the country. The Roman Catholics hold services in three churches, located in Jalalabad, Talas, and Bishkek. The small Jewish community operates one synagogue in Bishkek, and it organizes internal cultural studies and humanitarian services, chiefly food assistance for the elderly and persons with disabilities regardless of faith. One Buddhist temple serves the small Buddhist community. There are 12 registered Baha'i houses of worship. In addition, there are 240 registered Protestant houses of worship. The Church of Jesus Christ is the country's largest Protestant church with approximately 10 affiliates and an estimated 11,000 members, of whom approximately 40 percent are ethnic Kyrgyz. Other Protestant congregations include Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, nondenominational Protestants, Presbyterians, and Charismatics. There also are syncretistic religious practices. 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 cities with a larger ethnic Russian population. Other religious groups more commonly practice in the cities where their smaller communities tend to be concentrated. There is a correlation between ethnicity and religion; ethnic Kyrgyz are primarily Muslims, while ethnic Russians usually belong to either the Russian Orthodox Church or one of the Protestant denominations. However, some Christian pastors noted that the number of ethnic Kyrgyz converts to Christianity grew significantly during the year covered by this report. While there are no data available on active participation in formal religious services, a significant number of Muslims and Russian Orthodox adherents appear to be nominal believers and do not practice their faith actively. Religious practice in the south of the country is more traditional and devout than in other regions.

Missionary groups operate freely in the country. SARA has registered missionaries from all over the world representing an estimated 20 religious groups and denominations. According to SARA, since 1996 it has registered 1,133 missionaries, of whom 263 were Muslim and the rest represented other, mostly Christian, religious groups. During the period covered by this report, there were 111 registered missionaries, of whom 80 were Christian and 31 were Muslim. Missionaries disseminating dogma inconsistent with the traditional customs of local Muslims are subject to expulsion. According to SARA, of the approximately 20 missionaries expelled since

1991, all represented various "totalitarian sects," groups the SCRA considered incompatible with the standard principles of traditional world religious groups.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricted the activities of radical Islamic groups it considered to be threats to security. The Constitution provides for the separation of religion and state. The new Constitution, adopted on December 30, 2006, defines the country as a sovereign, unitary, democratic social state based on the rule of law; the previous Constitution had also defined the country as "secular." A May 6, 2006 decree recognized Islam and Russian Orthodoxy as "traditional religious groups."

Article 5 of the "Law On Religious Freedom and Religious Organizations" affirms that "the State does not interfere with the activity of religious organizations that adhere to established laws; does not allow for establishing advantages or restrictions of one religion over another; does not finance the activity of religious organizations and activity of propagating atheism."

Article 8 of the Constitution prohibits the formation of political parties on religious and ethnic grounds, as well as activities of religious organizations that jeopardize the state, constitutional system, or national security. Article 85 of the Constitution provides the Constitutional Court with the authority to determine the constitutionality of a religious organization's activities.

The Government recognizes 2 Muslim holy days (Kurman Ait or Eid al-Adha, and Orozo Ait or Eid al-Fitr) and one Russian Orthodox holy day (Orthodox Christmas) as national holidays. The President and the Government send greetings to Muslims and Orthodox adherents on their major holy days, and the greetings are printed in the mass media.

Established in 1993, the Muftiate (or Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan-SAMK) is the highest Islamic managing body in the country. The Muftiate oversees all Islamic entities, including institutes and madrassahs, mosques, and Islamic organizations. The Mufti is the official head of the Muftiate and is elected by the Council of Ulemas, which consists of 30 Islamic clerics and scholars. A Muftiate-established commission reviews and standardizes Islamic educational literature printed and distributed in the country and reviews new books on Islamic themes prior to publication. The Muftiate has the authority to ban publications that do not meet the established standards, an initiative it started and the Government supports.

SARA is responsible under the law for promoting religious tolerance, protecting freedom of conscience, and overseeing the application of laws on religion. The President appoints the Director, and the Prime Minister appoints the deputies of the agency. In June 2006 SARA moved its offices to the city of Osh in the south to be closer to the more religious part of the country.

A 1997 presidential decree requires the registration of all religious organizations with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), following approval from SARA. SARA can deny or postpone the certification of a particular religious group if SARA believes the proposed activities of that group are not religious in character. Unregistered religious organizations are prohibited from actions such as renting space and holding religious services, although many hold regular services without Government interference.

Organizations applying for registration must have at least 10 members who are adult citizens and must submit an application form, organizational charter, minutes of an institutional meeting, and a list of founding members to SARA for review. SARA then provides a recommendation to the MOJ for approval or rejection of the registration application. Recommendation for rejection occurs when 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. An applicant whose registration is denied may reapply and may appeal to the courts. The registration process with SARA is often cumbersome, taking a month to several years for completion. Each congregation must register separately.

If approved, a religious organization then must complete the registration process with the MOJ to obtain status as a legal entity, which is necessary to own property, open bank accounts, and otherwise engage in contractual activities. If a religious organization engages in commercial activity, it is required to pay taxes. In practice the MOJ has never registered a religious organization without prior approval by SARA. SARA reported that its staff continued to travel around the country to help unregistered religious entities prepare applications for registration.

According to SARA, there were 2,113 registered religious entities, including mosques, churches, foundations, NGOs of a religious nature, and religious educational institutions. SARA identified 1,742 Islamic entities, 46 entities of the Russian Orthodox Church, and 304 other "nontraditional" houses of worship, including 2 Russian churches of "Old Belief," 3 Catholic churches, 1 synagogue, 1 Buddhist temple, and 297 Protestant churches (48 Baptist, 21 Lutheran, 49 Pentecostal, 30 Adventist, 35 Presbyterian, 43 "Charismatic," 49 Jehovah's Witnesses, and 22 "other" Protestant churches). According to SARA, there are 21 "other religious entities" including 12 Baha'i centers, 21 religious centers of "other foreign confessions," 13 religious schools, and 7 religious foundations and unions.

Members of registered religious groups may fulfill alternative military service; it was reported in the press in 2005 that approximately 3,000 persons apply annually.

Missionaries of various religious groups operate freely, although they are required to register. Since 1996 SARA has registered more than 1,133 foreign citizens as religious missionaries. All religious entities founded by a foreigner must re-register each year with SARA, although the process is much less cumbersome than the initial registration. Missionaries are only required to register with SARA once.

The 1997 Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organizations 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 religious groups in public schools. These instructions came in response to concerns about the spread of Wahhabism and what the Government considered unconventional religious sects. The SCRA turned to a number of religious organizations for their ideas on introducing religious education; their reaction generally was negative, as they preferred to retain responsibility for the religious education of their adherents. SARA indicated that it was still developing a curriculum to teach about religious groups, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and several academic institutions. An August 9, 2006 press report indicated that the Government planned to introduce religious education into the secondary school curriculum; however, there had been no implementation of this plan by the end of the reporting period. Under the auspices of the Muftiate, volunteers called Davatchi visited villages in the south to teach traditional Islamic values.

The Islamic University oversees all Islamic schools, including madrassahs, to develop a standardized curriculum and curb the spread of extremist religious teaching. This program continued during the reporting period.

Since 2001 the Government has worked with representatives of various religious groups and NGOs on a draft law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," ostensibly in response to concerns about terrorism and other illegal activities committed by groups disguised as religious organizations. In May 2006, a group of parliamentary deputies proposed a different draft bill. Work on the new draft bill continued at the end of the reporting period.

The August 2005 law on "Countering Extremist Activity" seeks to "halt extremist activities by religious organizations or groups." Law enforcement officials have acted under this law to detain members of banned organizations, such as Hizb-ut Tahrir (HT), for distributing leaflets and other materials deemed to be of an extremist nature.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to express concern publicly about groups that it viewed as extremist because of either radical religious or political agendas. The Government was particularly concerned about the threat of political Islam, whose followers (Islamists) it labels "Wahhabists." The Government perceives radical Islamists to be a threat to national stability, particularly in the south, and fears that they seek to overthrow the Government and establish an Islamic theocracy. Armed incursions in 1999 and 2000 by members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a terrorist organization, and more recent incursions by unidentified terrorists in May 2006 increased the Government's concern regarding political Islam and the actions of militant Islamic groups.

In 2003 the Supreme Court sustained the ban on four political organizations, imposed because of extremism and alleged ties to international terrorist organizations: Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), the Islamic Party of Turkestan, the Organization for Freeing Eastern Turkestan, and the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party.

Several religious groups had difficulties registering. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), which initially applied for registration with SARA in August 2004, was still not registered at the end of the reporting period. Leaders of the Hare Krishna temple in Bishkek, after attempting unsuccessfully to register several times in the last 2 years, planned to resubmit the application for registration once the location of their new temple was confirmed.

According to the Union of Baptist Churches of Kyrgyzstan, several churches in Tash-Kumyr, At-Bashi, Osh, and Jalalabad continue to wait for registration, despite numerous meetings with SARA officials and submissions of applications. Church leaders attributed previous delays to the submission of improper documentation and information during the application process. On December 1, 2006, SARA refused registration of the Baptist Church in Karakulja, citing the local population's petition to SARA to prevent the church from staying open (see section 3).

According to church officials, the local community and government officials attempted to pressure Dzhanybek Zhakipov, the pastor of the Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ in Jalalabad, to close down his church in July 2006. Local law enforcement officials reportedly "tormented" the pastor after receiving complaints by relatives of Christian converts who belonged to his church. SARA officials showed the pastor a petition with 500 signatures requesting that the church be shut down. After court proceedings, a Jalalabad judge ordered SARA to register the church. The church continued to operate, and there were no reports of further pressure.

The Unification Church remained active, despite the SCRA suspension of its activities in 2003 for registration irregularities, a ruling upheld in an appeal to the Bishkek City Court.

Although the Government monitored, including by filming, Protestant and Muslim religious groups in the past, there were no reports of surveillance during the period covered by this report. There were unconfirmed reports that law enforcement officials monitored the activities of missionaries.

A Baptist pastor reported several cases of their foreign missionaries being denied visas or facing visa delays when attempting to visit the country. No missionaries were expelled, asked to leave the country, or denied registration during the reporting period.

On February 21, 2007, news agency Ferghana.ru reported that school administrators and teachers at the Kyzyljar School of the Jalalabad Oblast prohibited two female students from attending class because the students refused to remove their hijabs. A similar incident occurred in a neighboring village. Parents at both schools protested the prohibition of hijabs but the dispute continued as of the end of the reporting period. In December 2005 the Jalalabad city education department banned the wearing of hijabs in that city's schools. Several parents protested the move and demanded that the ban be lifted. SARA's stated position was that students, who for religious reasons choose to wear clothing that would indicate adherence to a particular religion, may attend religious schools.

According to news agency RFE/RL, Mutakalim, a Muslim women's NGO, requested a change in the legislation that bans females from wearing Islamic headscarves in official passport photos. The Government defended the current law as being a national security measure and rejected a petition from the group for lacking a sufficient number of signatures.

On March 10, 2007, State National Safety Committee (GKNB) officers in Jalalabad seized a warehouse containing Bibles owned by a Baptist church. The authorities told church administrators that the seizure was for the purpose of "expert examination." The GKNB refused to release the warehouse as of the end of the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On August 6, 2006, the special forces of the National Security Service (SNB) shot and killed three persons, including Mukhammadrafiq Kamalov, imam of the largest mosque in Karasuu. Immediately following the incident, Government officials stated that the three were affiliated with the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and were killed in the course of an antiterrorism operation. Kamalov's family and observers, including the ombudsman for human rights, denied security officials' allegations about the possible involvement of the imam in religious extremist groups. Security officials later conceded that Kamalov might not have been part of the group but instead may have been kidnapped by the suspected terrorists and thus killed accidentally in the raid. On May 24, 2006, security forces had detained Kamalov and searched his house on suspicion of his involvement in HT activities.

On several occasions during the period covered by this report, police arrested or fined members of the Islamic political organization HT for distributing leaflets. On February 21, 2007, local media reported that police detained a resident of Osh after discovering HT booklets and a hand grenade in his home. As of the end of the reporting period, the investigation continued.

Of the 12 men arrested in April 2006 for alleged links to a November 2004 grenade incident blamed on Islamic extremists, 4 remained in custody. It was unclear whether their detention was linked to their religious beliefs or practice.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

In 2006 the Church of Jesus Christ signed a 49-year lease for land upon which its church is located after resolving favorably an ongoing dispute with the Bishkek mayor's office.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There was no evidence of widespread societal discrimination or violence against members of different religious groups; however, there was evidence of periodic tension in rural areas between conservative Muslims and foreign Christian missionaries and individuals from traditionally Muslim ethnic groups who had converted to other religious groups. There were several reports that tensions between Muslims and Muslim converts continued. Both Muslim and Russian Orthodox spiritual leaders criticized the proselytizing activities of nontraditional Christian groups.

Several media outlets reported incidents of aggression against Baptist Pastor Zulumbek Sarygulov in Osh Oblast. According to Forum 18, the first incident occurred on July 28, 2006 when a crowd of 80 local Muslims broke into the Karakulja village Baptist Church in the Osh Oblast. The mob physically abused the pastor and burned his Bibles and other religious materials. Church leaders reported that local police on the scene made no efforts to stop the attack. Soon after the event, local police opened a criminal investigation, questioning Sarygulov and others for detailed accounts of the incident. After the initial inquiries, there were no further reports from the local authorities regarding developments in the investigation.

In a second incident on November 12, 2006, perpetrators threw Molotov cocktails at Sarygulov's church facilities, but church staff quickly extinguished the flames, and the fire caused little damage. Local authorities investigated the event but made no arrests. The investigation continued as of the end of the reporting period.

On December 1, 2006, according to Forum 18, SARA notified Aleksandr Nikitin, pastor of the Baptist church in Osh and regional coordinator for Baptist churches in the south, that the Karakulja church had been officially denied registration on the grounds that it operated for several years without having official registration. On March 5, 2007, a law enforcement official showed Forum 18 reporters a letter from SARA requesting that the police end the Karakulja Baptist church activities. The authorities took no further action as of the end of the reporting period.

On February 15, 2007, independently operated Channel 5 TV broadcast a program that portrayed the Church of Jesus Christ as being possibly associated with devil worshippers. The pastor provided a rebuttal to the program, but producers never aired it. Channel 5 producers aired opinions in support of the program's message presented by representatives of the "traditional religious groups" (Islam and Russian Orthodoxy).

Several Protestant pastors complained of difficulties interring deceased parishioners who converted from Islam to Christianity. Local Islamic and community leaders opposed the burial of converts in Islamic cemeteries. Officially, the cemetery plots are under Government control, but usually local Islamic figures oversee them. The Government resolved the problem by allotting new plots of land for Protestant cemeteries. However, the scarcity of such cemeteries forces Christians to travel great distances to bury their deceased.

There were no acts of violence, harassment, or vandalism reported against Jewish persons, community institutions, schools, synagogues, or cemeteries 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.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy continued to monitor the status of the draft law on religion and maintained contact with Government officials regarding religious affairs. Embassy representatives met with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups, and with NGOs monitoring religious freedom.

On October 24, 2006, the Deputy Chief of Mission addressed, in the Kyrgyz language, an estimated crowd of 50,000 Muslims who had gathered to pray in the main square of Bishkek for Eid al-Fitr, an Islamic holiday to commemorate the end of the holy month of Ramadan. His speech, which highlighted the importance of respect

for different religious groups, received positive coverage in numerous local newspapers and news Web sites in the country.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored a series of events to promote awareness of religious freedom. USAID's Legal Education program conducted a series of informational trainings for male and female students in the Islamic Institute in Osh, as well as training on basic rights for madrassah instructors in Jalalabad. In June 2006 USAID also sponsored five religious leaders and a representative of SARA to attend the "Role of Religion in Promoting Peace and Social Partnerships" regional conference of Central Asian Islamic religious leaders in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

In May and July 2006, USAID organized a series of eight focus group discussions that brought together Muslim, Russian Orthodox, and minority religious leaders, Government officials, and representatives of civil society to discuss international religious freedom standards and local legislation on religion in collaboration with SARA. As a complementary activity, a U.S. expert conducted three 1-day trainings for law students, lawyers, law professors, parliamentarians, civil society activists, and members of political parties on international religious freedom standards.

USAID's regional Religion, State, and Society Specialist also delivered a series of six lectures and held discussions with students and religious leaders in Osh and Jalalabad on the history of religious freedom in the United States during the period covered by this report.

Through the USAID-funded Community Connections program, 39 religious leaders representing a variety of denominations and Government officials who have a supervisory role over religious affairs traveled to the United States. Participants learned how religion and the state interact and which mechanisms serve to protect religious rights in the U.S. Participants also learned how the free practice of religion can serve as a positive social force in the lives of modern nations without constituting a security concern for the state.

A U.S. Government-funded institutional partnership continued between the Social Sciences Research Council and the Islamic University in Bishkek to supplement the religious curriculum with an international curriculum to include math, English, and a course on comparative world religious groups, and to establish exchange visits between university teachers in the two countries. In 2006 the council purchased computer equipment for the Islamic University. American professors were scheduled to visit the Islamic University in September 2007.

During the period covered by the report, the Embassy conducted several presentations on religious freedom, diversity, and tolerance in the United States for students of theology departments in Bishkek and southern provinces and distributed publications in Russian and Kyrgyz about Muslim life in the United States. In July and August 2006 two female Muslim leaders, the President of Progressive Public Union of Women "Hadisy" and a lecturer at the Islamic University, participated in an International Visitors Program designed for women in Islam titled, "Religious Tolerance with a Focus on Islam." The International Visitors traveled to California, Iowa, New York, North Carolina and Washington, D.C. and met with U.S. Department of State officials, American 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. After their return, the participants actively engaged in religious tolerance programs for youth.

In September 2006 the Embassy organized a Citizen Dialogue Tour with two U.S. female Muslim youth leaders who traveled to Bishkek and spoke about Muslims in America, particularly the role of women in Islam. The speakers gave interviews with local journalists, visited mosques, madrassahs, and universities to participate in roundtable discussions with students, and met with Muslim leaders and Government officials to discuss the role of women in Islam, religious tolerance, Islamic education, and gender issues.

MALDIVES

The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion. The Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens be Muslims. Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The law prohibits the practice by Maldivian citizens of any religion other than Islam. The president is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Government regulations are based on Islamic law (Shari'a). Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practice their religion only privately. Visitors must also refrain from encouraging local citizens to practice any religion other than Islam.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Freedom of religion remained severely restricted.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. According to many officials and interlocutors, most citizens regarded Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics and believed 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 country has an area of 500 square miles distributed across 1,200 coral atolls and islands, with a population of 350,000.

The population is a distinct ethnic group with historical roots in South Indian, Sinhalese, and Arab communities. The vast majority of the Muslim population practices Sunni Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners, including more than 500,000 tourists who visit annually (predominantly Europeans and Japanese) and approximately 54,000 foreign workers (mainly Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, and Bangladeshis), are in general allowed to practice their religions only in private. While Muslim tourists and Muslim foreign workers are allowed to attend local mosque services, most practice Islam in private or at mosques located at the resorts where they work and live.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion, and the Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that all citizens be Muslims. Many citizens, at all levels, believe that the Constitution requires all Maldivians to be Muslim. The Constitution also stipulates that the President must be Sunni and has the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Chapter II of the Constitution relating to the fundamental rights and duties of citizens does not provide for the right to freedom of religion or belief. Furthermore, the Constitution precludes non-Muslims from voting, obtaining citizenship, and holding public positions.

The "Law on the Protection of the Religious Unity" states that both the Government and the people must protect religious unity. Any statement or action contrary to this law is subject to criminal penalty; if found guilty, sentences range from a fine to imprisonment.

Non-Muslim foreign residents are allowed to practice their religions only if they do so privately and do not encourage local citizens to participate.

The Government follows civil law based on Shari'a. Civil law is subordinate to Shari'a; in the event a situation is not covered by civil law, as well as in certain cases such as divorce and adultery, Shari'a is applied.

Foreigners were not allowed to import any items deemed "contrary to Islam," including alcohol, pork products, or idols for worship. Alcoholic beverages were available to tourists on resort islands, but it remains against the law to offer alcohol to a local citizen.

Muslim holy days were generally national holidays.

Mosques were not required to register with the Government. The Government maintained and funded most mosques.

The primary responsibility of imams was to present Friday sermons. They used a set of Government-approved sermons on a variety of topics and were not legally empowered to write sermons independently. No one, not even an imam, may publicly discuss Islam unless invited to do so by the Government. According to Government officials, this rule was in place to maintain a moderate Islamic environment rather than a fundamentalist one.

Men who wish to act as imams must sit for public exams and present their scores and credentials to the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, chaired by the Chief Justice. The Supreme Council is empowered to certify imams. However, if the Supreme Council denies certification, the petitioner can appeal to the Board of Education.

Islamic instruction was a mandatory part of the school curriculum, and the Government funded the salaries of instructors of Islam. While Islamic instruction was only one component of the curriculum used in the majority of schools, there was one school which used Arabic as its medium of instruction and focused primarily on Islam. Many people who sought further religious education obtained it in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, or other Islamic countries. Schools offered religious education for women; however, there were no female imams.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom stated repeatedly that Maldivians are born Muslim. The Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs was mandated to provide guidance on religious matters, including centrally drafting sermons. The Government set standards for imams to ensure they have adequate theological qualifications and to prevent fundamentalism from gaining ground.

There were no places of worship for adherents of other religious groups. The Government prohibited the importation of icons and religious statues, but it generally permitted the importation of religious literature, such as Bibles, for personal use. The sale of religious items, such as Christmas cards, was restricted to the resort islands patronized by foreign tourists.

In March 2007 the press reported that some Maldivian workers employed by the Four Seasons Resort Island objected to having to carry out construction on two 10-meter tall Buddha statues. Requested by a visiting British business mogul, the statues were on display for his weekend birthday celebration. The resort's management insisted the Maldivian construction workers build the statues, which the employees said contravened local laws and customs. The employees built the statues, which remained on display for the duration of the visitor's trip.

On October 7, 2006, police cordoned off a locally-built mosque on Himandhoo Island, citing its existence as a "violation of religious harmony." Islanders told the media that the existing Government-built mosque was constructed over a cemetery, so they refused to worship there and built their own mosque. The police transferred Qur'ans and sacred materials to the island's administrative office for safe-keeping, then destroyed the locally-built mosque.

The press reported that on October 11, 2006, in Himandhoo, police used undue force in arresting nine persons, including a 16-year-old, for violating a law requiring uniformity of religion. The group was worshipping at a site on the beach after the closure of their locally-built mosque and objected to police video-recording their prayers. A confrontation ensued. Police reportedly hit and kicked several persons and used pepper spray against them. In November 2006 reportedly most Himandhoo residents continued to boycott the Government-built mosque.

Parents must raise their children to be Muslim in accordance with the law. Foreigners can raise their children to follow any religion as long as they practice privately in their homes or hotel rooms and do not try to include local citizens in their worship.

The Government prohibited non-Muslim clergy and missionaries from proselytizing or conducting public worship services. Islamic proselytizing was also illegal unless a Government representative was present. Conversion by a Muslim to another faith is a violation of Shari'a and may result in punishment, including the loss of the convert's citizenship. There were no known cases of the Government discovering converts and rescinding citizenship as a result of conversion. In the past, would-be converts were detained and counseled to dissuade them from converting.

According to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief's February 2007 report: "The Special Rapporteur received anecdotal information about a relatively small number of Maldivians who had converted away from Islam. She was informed that these individuals had not been able to admit to converting due to the potential social and legal ramifications. She was informed that on the rare occurrences in which Maldivians have been suspected of having converted to another religion, they have not been formally charged with apostasy, but have been detained and subjected to coercion in order to encourage or force them to reaffirm their faith in Islam. She was also informed that individuals suspected of having converted to another religion have been subjected to verbal abuse by members of the population. In theory a Maldivian residing abroad could change religion, but as a result, he or she would be denied a number of important political rights." Faith-based nongovernmental organizations were not specifically precluded by law from operating.

The law prohibits public statements that are contrary to Islam.

The Government registered only clubs and other private associations that do not contravene Islamic or civil law.

By law the president and cabinet ministers must be Sunni Muslims. Members of the People's Majlis (Parliament), the People's Special Majlis, Atoll Chiefs, and the judiciary must be Muslim; however, they are not required to be Sunni.

Under the country's Islamic practice, the testimony of two women is required to equal that of one man in matters such as adultery, finance, and inheritance. In other cases, the testimony of men and women is equal. Shari'a also governs estate 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." Family Law prohibits women from marrying non-Muslim foreigners but allows men to marry non-Muslim foreigners, as permitted by the Shari'a.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

According to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief's February 2007 report, "members of local congregations on some of the islands do not allow foreign manual laborers to attend the mosque." She was also informed that "expatriate school pupils who choose not to study Islam are unable to pass their end-of-year school exams." The Government denied these allegations.

When the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief visited the Maldives' only prison, she found non-Muslim prisoners "unable to perform their prayers due to the objections of their Maldivian cellmates." There were no accommodations made for Hindu prisoners with dietary restrictions.

The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief also reported on the issue of women wearing headscarves. She received reports that women were being pressured to cover by relatives, other citizens, self-proclaimed preachers, or newly formed political parties. Furthermore she was told that women began to cover after state-owned media reported that the 2004 tsunami was the "result of Maldivians failing to live in accordance with Islam." There was one report of a female student who was excluded from school for wearing a headscarf. However, female civil servants wore the scarf at work without any difficulty.

Most citizens regard Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics and believed that it promotes harmony and national identity. The President regularly encourages all citizens to seek unity through shared religious beliefs.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government does not maintain an Embassy in the country. The U.S. Ambassador in Colombo, Sri Lanka, is also accredited to the Government in Male, and Embassy Colombo officers travel frequently to the country. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

NEPAL

Nepal is a secular state under the Interim Constitution, which was promulgated on January 15, 2007. The Interim Constitution provides for freedom to practice one's religion. The Interim Constitution also specifically denies the right to convert another person. The now-defunct Constitution of 1990, which was in effect until January 15, 2007, described the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it did not establish Hinduism as the state religion. The Government generally did not interfere with the practice of other religious groups, and religious tolerance was broadly observed; however, there were some restrictions.

The Government took positive preliminary steps with respect to religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and Government policy contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Interim Parliament, through the Interim Constitution, officially declared the country a secular state in January 2007; however, no laws specifically affecting freedom of religion were changed. Nonetheless, many believed that the declaration made it easier to practice their religion freely. However, members of minority religious groups occasionally reported police harassment. Authorities limited the location of and otherwise restricted many public celebrations by the Tibetan community, especially those with political overtones.

Adherents of the country's many religious groups generally coexisted peacefully and respected places of worship, although there were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Those who converted to another religious group at times faced violence and occasionally were ostracized socially but generally did 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, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 54,363 square miles and a population of 28 million. Hindus constitute approximately 81 percent of the population; Buddhists, 11 percent; Muslims, the majority Sunni, 4.2 percent; and practitioners of Kirant (an indigenous animist religion) and others, 4 percent, of which 0.45 percent are Christian. Christian leaders conservatively estimated their number of adherents at more than 800,000. Press reports indicated that there are more than 170 Christian churches operating in Kathmandu alone. According to the chairman of the Madrassah Islamiyah Association, there are almost 2,500 madrassahs. Twenty thousand Tibetan Buddhist refugees reside in the country.

There were no missionaries officially operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Interim Constitution provides for freedom of religion and permits the practice of all religious groups; however, there are some restrictions. The Interim Parliament declared the country a secular state in the Interim Constitution in January 2007. The previous Constitution described the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it did not establish Hinduism as the state religion. Article 23 of the Interim Constitution protects the rights of all religious groups by guaranteeing the individual the right "to profess and practice his/her own religion as handed down to him/her from ancient times having due regard to traditional practices." It also states "no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another and shall not take actions or behave in a way that would create disturbance in another's religion."

The Interim Constitution maintains the stipulation from the 1990 Constitution that no one can be discriminated against based on caste. In 2002 the previous Government constituted a National Dalit Commission charged with protecting and promoting Dalit (formerly called "untouchable") rights and ensuring active participation of the Dalit community in the development of the country. Before the People's Movement in April 2006, which led to removal of the King and his Government, the Commission devised legal and policy arrangements for Dalit rights, made recommendations to implement international conventions to which the country is a party, monitored and coordinated Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on efforts to uplift Dalits, and launched programs on social awareness to end social discrimination and untouchability. After the success of the People's Movement, many members of the Commission were accused of being royalist and resigned, and the Commission was unable to function. The Interim Government nominated 16 members to the Commission on June 3, 2007.

There are no specific laws favoring the Hindu majority, nor does the Government control the expression of Hinduism.

Although there were no registration requirements for religious groups, there were legal registration requirements for NGOs. Organizations had been prohibited from registering if their names contained religious words. However, this began to change in April 2007 when the Government allowed the registration of an organization with the word "Bible" in its title. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish religious organizations claimed that, unless registered, such organizations were restricted from owning land, an important step for establishing churches, mosques, synagogues, or burial sites. An organization that provides religious services and kosher foods to Jewish adherents (generally tourists) complained that the organization was not able to legally register as a religious organization and its workers had to enter the country on business visas.

Proselytizing remained illegal. There are officially no foreign missionaries; however, for decades dozens of Christian missionary hospitals, welfare organizations, and schools have operated in the country. These organizations did not proselytize, and otherwise operated freely. Missionary schools were among the most respected institutions of secondary education; many members of the governing and business elite graduated from Jesuit high schools. Foreign workers in the missionary hospitals and schools entered the country with visas designating them as technical workers for local or international NGOs sponsoring the hospitals and schools. The Government enforced these immigration laws; if foreign workers were found to proselytize, they were expelled from the country. There were no expulsions during the reporting period. Many foreign Christian organizations had direct ties to local churches and sponsored pastors for religious training abroad.

Some holy days, most of them Hindu, were recognized as national holidays. These were Mahashivaratri, Buddha Jayanti, Falgun Purnima, Krishna Asthami, Dasain, and Tihar.

Although public schools did not teach religion, most had a statue of Saraswoti, the Hindu goddess of learning, on their grounds. Many began the day with a Hindu prayer to the goddess.

The Government had no formal policy on interfaith understanding. A local NGO, the Interreligious Council of Nepal, consisting of representatives of the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Baha'i faiths, was active in promoting peace in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Tibetan Buddhists faced various restrictions on their celebrations. Local authorities generally restricted celebration of Tibetan religious festivals to private property. Police in Kathmandu prohibited Tibetans celebrating the New Year from carrying pictures of the Dalai Lama around an important Buddhist temple as part of religious ceremonies. The Government also restricted all other non-religious local Tibetan celebrations (Tibetan New Year, the Dalai Lama's birthday, and Democracy Day) to private property. On March 10, 2007, however, the Tibetan community was allowed to march freely in the street, demanding "freedom and justice for Tibet." During the reporting period, the Government revoked the legally obtained registration of a welfare office to look after Tibetan refugees (a lawsuit was pending at the end of the reporting period) and did not allow the registration of an office to represent the Dalai Lama. The welfare office previously looked after more than 20,000 Tibetan refugees who left their homeland after the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959.

The law prohibits converting others and proselytizing; these activities are punishable by fines, imprisonment, or, for foreigners, expulsion. However, personal conversion is allowed. Some Christian and Muslim groups were concerned that the ban on proselytizing limited the expression of non-Hindu religious belief. NGOs or individuals were allowed to file reports that individuals or organizations were proselytizing, and the Government investigated these reports.

There were no incidents of punishment for conversion or proselytism during the reporting period.

Madrassahs, but not mosques, are required to register with local district administration offices (part of the Home Ministry) and supply information about their funding sources to operate; they receive no Government funding. Some Muslim leaders criticized the move as discriminatory; however, the registration requirement has not been enforced. Muslims were not restricted from participating in the Hajj, although the Government did not subsidize the pilgrimage.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste; however, the caste system strongly influences society. While the Government has stressed that caste-based discrimination is illegal and temple access for "lower castes" has improved in some areas, caste discrimination was frequently practiced at Hindu temples, where Dalits were forbidden from entering by some Hindu priests.

There were no restrictions on the selling or possession of religious literature.

Civil servants may take off religious holidays and celebrate them on private property without Government interference.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) is a designated terrorist organization on the U.S. Government's "Terrorist Exclusion List" of the Immigration and Nationality Act and under Executive Order 13224.

On January 15, 2007, the Maoists joined the Interim Parliament with 83 appointed members. On April 1, 2007, an Interim Government was formed with Maoist participation. Maoist ministers headed five ministries in the Government, including the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare, which controls registration of NGOs, and the Ministry of Local Development, which controls development activities. At the end of the reporting period, it was unclear what effect, if any, this would have on religious freedom.

During the period covered by this report, Maoist insurgents restricted religious freedom in parts of the country. There were reports of Maoists enforcing a "people's calendar" in schools that did not allow for religious holidays. Maoists sometimes demanded the use of religious organization facilities for their indoctrination programs,

threatening to padlock the buildings if their demands were refused. There were also reports that they used Hindu temples as facilities for the Maoist-run "People's Courts."

There were scattered reports of Maoist insurgents attacking Hindu temples and harassing Hindu priests during the reporting period.

Christian organizations reported several cases where Maoists extorted cash from churches. The Maoists threatened retribution against church property and church members if the congregations did not meet their demands. Some churches complied with the demands, while others refused.

In October 2006 Maoists closed the Kashi Gaun Church in Kashi village, Gorkha. Local religious Lamas were concerned that if persons converted to Christianity, they would abandon their traditional religious beliefs. Maoists took advantage of this dispute between the Lamas and the locals to close the church. Members of the Nepal Interreligious Council visited Gorkha and met with religious and district leaders. They convinced local leaders that since the country is a secular state, they should not impose restrictions on freedom of religion. Eventually the Maoists agreed to reopen the church in February 2007.

On September 24, 2006, Maoists used a Hindu temple as the venue for their People's Court in Chandranigapur, Rautahat District.

On August 21, 2006, a group of Maoists disrupted a religious function organized by a pro-Hindu organization in Bhairahawa, accusing the group of attempting to reestablish the monarchy.

On September 21, 2005, a group of armed Maoists attacked and vandalized Ramchandra Temple in Muga village of Dhankuta District.

In May 2005 Narayan Pokharel, President of the country's branch of the World Hindu Council, was killed in the District of Rupandehi, approximately 300 kilometers (175 miles) from Kathmandu. Although no one claimed responsibility, police suspected the involvement of Maoist rebels. No one was charged in the case.

On December 29, 2004, Maoists shot and killed Arun Budhathoki, Chief of Shiv Sena Nepal, a Hindu religious organization, in Nepalgunj, Banke District. No one was charged with the crime.

On September 12, 2004, Maoists exploded a bomb and forced the closure of St. Joseph's school in Pokhara. No case was filed.

In September 2004 Maoist threats prompted the temporary closing of 21 churches in Sankhuwasabha District.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Adherents of the country's many religious groups generally coexisted peacefully and respected places of worship. Most Hindus respected the many Buddhist shrines located throughout the country; Buddhists accorded Hindu shrines the same respect. Buddha's birthplace is an important pilgrimage site, and his birthday is a national holiday. However, some Christian groups reported that Hindu extremism increased in recent years, especially since the Parliamentary declaration of the country as a "secular state" instead of a "Hindu Kingdom." Of particular concern were the local affiliates of the India-based Hindu political party Shiv Sena, locally known as Pashupati Sena, Shiv Sena Nepal, and Nepal Shivsena. This group was accused of playing a role in the violence in the Terai, the southern area of Nepal along the border with India, in late 2006 and early 2007.

Some citizens were wary of proselytizing and conversion by Christians and viewed the growth of Christianity with concern. There were unconfirmed reports that Maoists suppressed religious observance in areas under their control through intimidation and harassment.

Those who chose to convert to other religions, in particular Hindu citizens who converted to Islam or Christianity, were sometimes ostracized. They occasionally faced isolated incidents of hostility or discrimination from Hindu extremist groups. Some reportedly were forced to leave their villages. While this prejudice was not systematic, it was occasionally violent. Nevertheless, converts generally were not afraid to publicly admit their new religious affiliations.

Although such discrimination is prohibited by the Constitution, the caste system strongly influenced society. Societal discrimination against members of lower castes and Dalits remained widespread despite the Government's efforts to protect the rights of disadvantaged castes. Lower castes also experienced discrimination in many other areas of life, including education, employment, and marriage. Other religious communities did not practice caste discrimination. Entrance into many Hindu temples was often restricted for persons not of South Asian ethnicity, who are unlikely to be Hindu.

On April 11, 2007, the Ministry of Education and Sports reported that Dalit students in Parbat District had been refused admission to the high school completion examination based on their caste. The Ministry said it would take action against those involved; however, at the end of the reporting period, the Ministry had not done so.

On March 4, 2007, more than 100 Dalit families were forced to leave their village in Rautahat District after a clash between a Dalit and a higher caste individual during a religious festival. The families returned to their village on March 8 after police, human rights activists, and Dalit organizations intervened.

In October 2006 a Dalit family in Doti District was banished from its community because family members refused to play music (their traditional role) during a Hindu religious celebration. The family took refuge in a neighboring village.

SECTION IV. U.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 Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other religious groups. The Embassy closely monitored religious freedom and raised the issue with the Government when appropriate.

PAKISTAN

The country is an Islamic republic. Islam is the state religion and the Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam. The Constitution states, "subject to law, public order and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion;" however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. Freedom of speech is constitutionally "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam."

The Government took some steps to improve its treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report, but serious problems remained. Law enforcement personnel abused religious minorities in custody. Security forces and other Government agencies did not adequately prevent or address societal abuse against minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith fostered religious intolerance, acts of violence, and intimidation against religious minorities. Specific laws that discriminate against religious minorities include anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws that provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets. The Government enacted the Women's Protection Act, which amended the Hudood Ordinances, by moving rape and adultery cases from the Shari'a to secular courts. President Pervez Musharraf ordered the release of all women imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinances; few remain in custody, and most are housed in Government-run group homes.

The Ahmadiyya community continued to face governmental and societal discrimination and legal bars to the practice of its faith. Members of other Islamic sects also claimed governmental discrimination.

Relations between religious communities were tense. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was widespread, and societal violence against such groups occurred. Societal actors, including terrorist and extremist groups and individuals, targeted religious congregations.

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 officials closely monitored the treatment of religious minorities and worked to eliminate the teaching of religious intolerance and encourage amendment of the blasphemy laws.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 310,527 square miles and a population of 168 million. Official figures on religious demography, based on the most recent census, taken in 1998, showed that approximately 96 percent of the population was Muslim. Groups comprising 2 percent of the population or less include Hindus, Christians, and others including Ahmadis. The majority of Muslims in the country are Sunni, with a Shi'a minority ranging between 10 to 20 percent. Parsis (Zoroastrians), Sikhs, and Buddhists each had approximately 20,000 adherents, while the Baha'i claimed

30,000. Some tribes in Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) practiced traditional animist religions.

Less than 0.5 percent of the population was silent on religion or claimed not to adhere to a particular religious group. Social pressure was such that few persons would claim no religious affiliation.

No data were available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals. Religion often played an important part in daily life. Most Muslims offered prayers on Friday, Islam's holy day. Many prayed daily. During the month of Ramadan, many less observant Muslims fasted and attended services. Approximately 70 percent of English-speaking Roman Catholics worshiped regularly; a much lower percentage of Urdu speaking Catholics did so. Attendance at Hindu religious services increased during festivals.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. It also declares that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to profess and practice their religions freely; however, in reality the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion, particularly on Ahmadis.

A 1974 constitutional amendment declares Ahmadis to be non-Muslim. Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi laws," prohibits Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims, referring to their faith as Islam, preaching or propagating their faith, inviting others to accept the Ahmadi faith, or insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The punishment for violation of the section is imprisonment for up to 3 years and a fine. Other religious communities were generally free to observe their religious obligations; however, religious minorities are legally restricted from public display of certain religious images and, due to discriminatory legislation and social pressure, are often afraid to profess their religion freely.

Freedom of speech is subject to "reasonable" restrictions in the interests of the "glory of Islam." The consequences for contravening the country's blasphemy laws are death for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting another's religious feelings. These laws are often used to settle personal scores as well as to intimidate reform-minded Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities. Under the Anti-Terrorist Act, any action, including speech, intended to stir up religious hatred is punishable by up to 7 years of 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.

In addition, any speech or conduct that injures another's religious feelings, including those of minority religious groups, is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment. However, in cases where the religious feelings of a minority religion were insulted, the blasphemy laws were rarely enforced and cases rarely brought to the legal system. A 2005 law requires that a senior police official investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint is filed.

The Penal Code ostensibly incorporates a number of Islamic law (Shari'a) provisions. The judicial system encompasses several different court systems with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions that 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; judges and attorneys in these courts must be Muslim. The Federal Shari'a court may overturn any legislation judged to be inconsistent with the tenets of Islam. In March 2005, in a blow to the power of the Shariat appellate benches, the Supreme Court Chief Justice, issuing a stay in the Mukhtaran Mai rape case, ruled that the Federal Shari'a court had no jurisdiction to review a decision by a provincial high court even if the Federal Shari'a court should have had initial appellate jurisdiction.

Criminal law allows offenders to offer monetary restitution to victims and allows victims to carry out physical retribution rather than seek punishment through the court system. This supposedly Islamic provision applied to all. Religious minorities claimed that minority offenders faced far higher, and minority victims received far lower, amounts of monetary restitution than did Muslims.

President Musharraf strongly promoted, and on December 1, 2006, signed into law the Protection of Women Act, which essentially moved cases of rape and adultery to secular rather than Shari'a courts. Previously, the Hudood Ordinances, which criminalize rape, extramarital sex, property crimes, alcohol, and gambling, often relied on harsh and discriminatory Qur'anic standards of evidence and punishment,

which applied equally to Muslims and non-Muslims. If Qur'anic standards are used, Muslim and non-Muslim and male and female testimony carries different weight.

The Government designates religion on passports and national identity cards. Citizens must have a national identity card to vote. Those wishing to be listed as a Muslim must swear to believe that Muhammad is the final prophet and denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslims, a provision designed to discriminate against Ahmadis. Initial voter registration no longer required such an oath, but the Election Commission claimed that any Muslim registrant whose religion was challenged by the public would have to take the oath. As a result, Ahmadis continued to boycott elections.

The Constitution provides for the "freedom to manage religious institutions." In principle, the Government does not restrict organized religious groups from establishing places of worship and training members of the clergy. In practice, however, religious minorities suffered from restrictions on this right.

The state provides funding for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and Federal Governments have legal responsibility for certain religious properties belonging to minority communities that were abandoned during partition. Minority communities claimed the Government did not spend adequate funds on their protection and upkeep. The Government collected a 2.5 percent tax ("zakaat") on all Sunni Muslims, which was distributed to Sunni mosques and charities. No similar requirement was imposed on other religious groups.

Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority religious groups. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, which is mandated to safeguard religious freedom, 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 questioned these figures, observing that localities and villages housing minority citizens go without basic civic amenities. The Ministry had on its masthead a Qur'anic verse: "Islam is the only religion acceptable to God."

Muslim religious holidays are national holidays.

The Constitution safeguards "educational institutions with respect to religion." No student can be forced to receive religious instruction or participate in religious worship other than his or her own. The denial of religious instruction for students of any religious community or denomination is also prohibited.

"Islamiyyat" (Islamic studies) was compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other religious groups were not legally required to study Islam, they were not provided with parallel studies in their own religions. In some schools non-Muslim students could study "Akhlaqiyyat," or Ethics.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution solely based on religion. Government officials stated that the only factors affecting admission to governmental educational institutions were students' grades and home provinces; however, students must declare their religion on application forms. Muslim students must declare in writing that they believe that Muhammad is the final prophet, a measure that singles out Ahmadis. Non-Muslims must have their religion verified by the head of their local religious community.

Parents were free to send children to religious schools, at their expense, and many did. Private schools were free to teach or not teach religion as they choose.

Islamic schools known as madrassahs are traditional institutions for Muslims seeking a purely religious education; in recent years many madrassahs have taught extremist doctrine in support of terrorism. In many rural communities they are the only form of education available. In an attempt to curb the spread of extremism, the 2002 Madrassah Registration Ordinance required all madrassahs to register with one of the five independent boards (wafaqs), cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their government. According to the Interior Ministry, 95 percent of foreign madrassah students departed by the July 2005 deadline imposed by President Musharraf. According to the Religious Affairs Ministry, approximately 11,000 out of an estimated 13,000 to 15,000 madrassahs had registered by the end of the reporting period.

In December 2005 President Musharraf laid out the framework for cooperative registration of madrassahs with the Government, including provision of financial and educational data and a prohibition on the teaching of sectarian or religious hatred and violence. The Government and the independent madrassah boards agreed to a phased introduction of secular subjects, including math, English, and science at all madrassahs.

All wafaqs mandated the elimination of teaching that promoted religious or sectarian intolerance and terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs. Inspectors mandated that affiliated madrassahs supplement religious studies with secular sub-

jects, including English, math, and science. Wafaqs also restricted foreign private funding of madrassahs. Examination concerns remained under active discussion with the Government. Some unregistered and Deobandi-controlled madrassahs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and northern Balochistan continued to teach extremism. Similarly, the Dawa schools run by Jamat-ud-Dawa continued such teaching and recruitment for Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization.

A March 2007 report indicated that unregulated, extremist madrassahs in Karachi continued to thrive in the sprawling city with a large population of young, unemployed men. International Crisis Group reported that after 5 years of trying to reform madrassahs, the Government's program has not fully succeeded, and that extremist groups were operating mosques and madrassahs in the open in Karachi and elsewhere, due to lack of consistent regulation.

The Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)-led provincial government, a coalition of six conservative parties in the NWFP, continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with conservative Islamic views. If implemented, many of these initiatives would impose Islamic law on all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation. Existing laws include antiobscenity measures under which advertising has been torn down, stores have been fined for selling certain western recordings, a complete ban on alcohol, and a requirement for civil servants to pray five times daily.

The Government does not restrict religious publishing in general; however, the sale of Ahmadi religious literature is banned. The law prohibits publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets or insults to another's religion.

The Government, at its most senior levels, continued to call for interfaith dialogue and sectarian harmony as part of its program to promote enlightened moderation. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the Council on Islamic Ideology, a constitutionally mandated Government body, continued to sponsor interfaith and intersectarian workshops and meetings. The primary responsibility of the Religious Affairs Ministry is to organize participation in the Hajj and other Muslim religious pilgrimages and to distribute zakaat.

The Government did not prohibit, restrict, or punish parents for raising children in accordance with religious teachings and practices of their choice, nor did it take steps to prevent parents from teaching their children religion in the privacy of the home.

There are no legal requirements for an individual to practice or affiliate nominally with a religion. However, the Constitution requires that the president and Prime Minister be Muslims. All senior officials, including members of parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity. Government employees are not prohibited from displaying or practicing any elements of their faith.

Missionaries (except Ahmadis) operate in the country and can proselytize, as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge they are not Muslim. Missionaries are required to have specific visas, valid from 2 to 5 years and are allowed one entry into the country per year. Only "replacement" visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems were frequent.

In accordance with the Anti-Terrorist Act, the Government banned the activities of and membership in several religious extremist and terrorist groups. The Anti-Terrorist Act allows the Government to use special streamlined courts to try violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts or speech designed to foment religious hatred, and crimes against the state; however, many of the groups that the Government banned remained active.

The state does not recognize either civil or common law marriage. Marriages are performed and registered according to one's religion. The marriages of non-Muslim men remain legal upon conversion to Islam but are considered dissolved for marriages of female converts to Islam if they were performed under the rites of their previous religion. Children born to Hindu or Christian women who convert to Islam after marriage are considered illegitimate unless their husbands also convert. Children of non-Muslim men who convert are considered legitimate. A Muslim man can marry a woman "of the Book" (Jew or Christian) but cannot marry a woman of any other faith unless she converts to Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. Muslim women may only marry Muslim men. The children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who both convert to another religion are considered illegitimate and are seized by the state. In addition, a convert from Islam becomes an apostate and is eligible for the death penalty.

In effect, the state recognizes a marriage if both bride and groom are of the same religion, irrespective of the sect, or if the Groom is Muslim and bride is "of the Book."

Children born to these couples are considered legitimate. If the bride is Muslim and groom is not, they are not considered married and their children are illegitimate. Since Muslim males are not allowed to convert to any other religion, the only way the marriage can be legitimated and the children made eligible for inheritance is if the groom converts to Islam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government used anti-Ahmadi laws to target and harass Ahmadis. The vague wording of the provision that forbids Ahmadis from directly or indirectly posing as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting form and for naming their children Muhammad. The Ahmadi community claimed that during the period covered by this report, 28 Ahmadis faced criminal charges under religious laws or because of their faith: 4 under the blasphemy laws, 17 under Ahmadi-specific laws, and 7 under other laws but motivated by their Ahmadi faith.

At the end of April 2006, four Ahmadis were in prison on blasphemy charges; one was in prison and two more were out on bail facing murder charges that the Ahmadiyya community claimed were falsely brought due to their religious beliefs. Seven more criminal cases, ranging from murder to destruction of property, were filed against prominent members of the Ahmadi community during the reporting period. The cases remained unprosecuted and the accused were allowed to post bail.

Ahmadis continued to be arrested for preaching their faith. In July 2006 four Ahmadis were arrested in Sialkot District under the anti-Ahmadi laws for preaching.

In August 2006 Mian Mohammed Yar was charged under the anti-Ahmadi laws on the charge of preaching. He was the president of the local Ahmadi community.

Since 1983 Ahmadis have been prohibited from holding public conferences or gatherings, they have been denied permission to hold their annual conference. Ahmadis were banned from preaching and were prohibited from traveling to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj or other religious pilgrimages. Ahmadi publications were banned from public sale, but they published religious literature in large quantities for a limited circulation.

While the Constitution guarantees the right to establish places of worship and train clergy, in practice Ahmadis suffered from restrictions on this right. According to press reports, authorities continued to conduct surveillance on Ahmadis and their institutions. Several Ahmadi mosques reportedly were closed; others reportedly were desecrated or had their construction stopped.

Public pressure routinely prevented courts from protecting minority rights. These same pressures forced justices to take strong action against any perceived offense to Sunni orthodoxy. Discrimination against religious minorities was rarely placed before the judiciary. Courts would be unlikely to act objectively in such cases. Resolving cases was very slow; there was generally a long period between filing the case and the first court appearance. Lower courts were frequently intimidated, delayed decisions, and refused bail for fear of reprisal from extremist elements. Bail in blasphemy cases was usually denied by original trial courts, arguing that since defendants faced the death penalty, they were likely to flee. Many defendants appealed the denial of bail, but bail was often not granted in advance of the trial.

In schools, teachers required many non-Muslim students to complete Islamic studies. Christian students were also reportedly forced to eat at separate tables in public schools that are predominately Muslim.

Many district governments restricted the distribution and display of certain religious images, such as the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ; however, such images were readily available in other parts of the country.

Religious belief or specific adherence to a religion was not required for membership in the ruling party or the moderate opposition parties, which did not exclude members of any religion. The MMA had non-Muslim Members of Parliament; however, in practice, each of its constituent parties generally restricted membership to its sectarian adherents.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular faith, religious belief, or interpretation of religious doctrine. The Government monitored the activities of various Islamist parties and affiliated clergy due to prior links to terrorist and extremist organizations.

Foreign books must pass Government censors before being reprinted. Books and magazines may be imported freely but are subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content.

The Government funded and facilitated Hajj travel but had no similar program for pilgrimages by religious minorities. In addition to prohibiting Ahmadi travel for

the Hajj, the Government prevented Baha'is from traveling to their spiritual center in Israel due to nonrecognition of that country.

Sunni Muslims appeared to receive favorable consideration in Government hiring and advancement. Shi'a and other religious minorities contended that the Government persistently discriminated against members of their communities in hiring for the civil service and in admissions to Government institutions of higher learning. Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadis, who contended that a "glass ceiling" prevented them from being promoted to senior positions and that certain Government departments refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadis. The Government discriminated against some groups, such as Ahl-e-Hadith and Barelvi, when hiring clergy for Government mosques and faculty members for Islamic Government colleges.

There are reserved seats for religious minority members in both the national and provincial assemblies. Such seats are allocated to the political parties on a proportional basis determined by their overall representation in the assembly.

Members of minority religious groups volunteered for military service in small numbers, and there were no official obstacles to their advancement; however, in practice non-Muslims rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to politically sensitive positions. A chaplaincy corps provided services for Muslim soldiers, but no similar services were available for religious minorities. During this reporting period, a Sikh graduated from the military academy in Abbottabad for the first time.

The public school curriculum included derogatory remarks in textbooks against minority religious groups, particularly Hindus and Jews, and the generalized teaching of religious intolerance was acceptable. The Government continued to modernize curriculum to eliminate such teachings and to remove Islamic overtones from secular subjects. Instead of a mandatory Islamic studies class, the Education Minister supported offering an ethics class as an alternative. The Government discriminated against Ahmadis and Christians when they applied for entry to university and medical school because of their religious affiliation.

Officials used bureaucratic demands and bribes to delay religious groups trying to build houses of worship or to obtain land. While Ahmadis were prevented from building houses of worship, Sunni Muslim groups built mosques and shrines without Government permission, at times in violation of zoning ordinances and upon Government-owned lands.

Nearly all women charged under the Hudood Ordinances were released following the passage of the Women's Protection Act. Several hundred remain within the legal system, but they were now housed in various Daarul Amaans (state operated women's shelters). Many were unable to return to their homes because of social ostracism.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Police commonly tortured and mistreated those in custody and at times engaged in extrajudicial killings. It was usually impossible to ascertain whether religion was a factor in cases in which religious minorities were victims; however, both Christian and Ahmadi communities claimed their members were more likely to be abused. Non-Muslim prisoners generally were accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates.

Authorities routinely used the blasphemy laws to harass religious minorities and reform-minded Muslims and to settle personal scores or business rivalries. Authorities detained and convicted individuals on spurious charges. Judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid a confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continued trials indefinitely.

Ahmadi leaders claimed the Government used regular sections of the Penal Code against their members for religious reasons. Authorities often accused converts to the Ahmadiyya community of blasphemy, violations of the anti-Ahmadi laws, or other crimes. Conversion to other minority religious groups generally took place in secret to avoid a societal backlash.

During the reporting period, authorities arrested at least 25 Ahmadis, 10 Christians, and 6 Muslims on blasphemy charges. Many remained in prison at the end of the reporting period. The National Commission for Justice and Peace stated that "Generally we do not request bail because of security. Blasphemy suspects are often safest in prison under police protection."

In May 2007 officials released on bail Martha Bibi, a Christian accused of blasphemy. She had been in prison since her arrest in January 2007. Accused of making derogatory remarks against the Qur'an, she claimed the charges originated from

Muslim contractors who did not want to pay for materials sold to them by Bibi's husband.

In May 2007 authorities arrested Walter Fazal Khan for blasphemy. Walter is an 84-year-old Christian accused of burning a Qur'an. The family claimed he was a victim of Muslim businessmen who wanted to buy land Khan was selling for much lower than the asking price. After his arrest, local religious leaders forced Khan's 86-year-old wife to convert to Islam.

In April 2007 a mob tortured a Catholic man, Sattar Masih, before police arrived and arrested him for allegedly writing blasphemous words against the Prophet Muhammad. Police reportedly tortured him again in prison to obtain a confession.

In April 2007 officials accused Salamat Masih, a Christian in Toba Tek Singh, and four members of his family of desecrating papers bearing the Prophet Muhammad's name. Officials arrested Salamat, but the other four remained in hiding, including Salamat's 11-year-old son.

In March 2007 a mob of Muslims attacked Amanat Masih, a Christian, for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an. Police arrested Masih for blasphemy. At the end of the reporting period, he was still in prison.

In January 2007 a court acquitted Shahbaz Masih, a Christian who was convicted of blasphemy more than 2 years ago. The courts determined he was mentally unstable and cut short his 25-year sentence. Including his pretrial detention, he had been in jail for nearly 6 years after he was accused of ripping pages of a Qur'an in a Muslim graveyard.

In January 2007 Shahid Masih, a 17-year-old Christian arrested on blasphemy charges 4 months earlier, was released on $1,650 bail and immediately went into hiding, afraid of the reaction of local radical Muslims who had been following the case. He reported that fellow prisoners beat him in prison because of his alleged crime, until police put him in a private cell. Authorities accused him and a Muslim friend of tearing pages out of a book that included the Qur'an.

On November 27, 2006, courts convicted Catholics James Masih and Buta Masih of blasphemy for allegedly burning a Qur'an and sentenced them to 10 years in prison.

On November 10, 2006, a court overturned Ranjha Masih's life sentence for blasphemy. He was convicted in April 2003.

In October 2006 police arrested Ahmadi Mohammed Tariq and charged him under blasphemy laws for allegedly tearing off anti-Ahmadiyya stickers inside a bus. Police released him on bail in December 2006 and at the end of the reporting period, he was awaiting trial.

In September 2006 police released on bail two Ahmadi journalists working for an Ahmadi publication, *Al Fazl*, whom they had charged under blasphemy laws. Three others from *Al Fazl*, an editor, a publisher, and a printer, remained in confinement awaiting court proceedings on the same charges.

In July 2006 courts released on bail Hafiz Afzal Rehman and Hiji Latif, who had been held in a Lahore prison on blasphemy charges since 2004. Their trials were pending.

Minority communities charged the Government was complicit in seizures of their property by Muslims and that the Government policy of dismantling illegal slum settlements disproportionately targeted minority communities. These groups also accused the Government of inaction in cases of attacks by extremist groups on places of worship belonging to minority groups.

In the spring of 2007, members of the Ahmadi community purchased 6 acres of land outside Lahore to expand a preexisting cemetery. Local clerics denounced the purchase and held demonstrations against the Ahmadi community. Police sided with the clerics, and local authorities claimed the construction of a wall on the land would be used to form a "center of apostasy." When the Ahmadis refused to remove the wall, five buses of policemen arrived and destroyed it in the middle of the night. Officials admitted the action was taken under pressure of local clerics.

In March 2007 more than 160 Christian prisoners at Adiala Jail in Punjab participated in a 2-day hunger strike until authorities returned their place of worship, a laundry room.

In December 2006 a local mullah collaborated with police to prevent the burial of Bakht Bibi, an Ahmadi woman, in the common village graveyard. She was finally buried on private land 1.5 kilometers away. The same mullah had convinced police to close an Ahmadi prayer center 1 month prior.

In October 2006 police stopped construction of a new Ahmadi school in Sialkot district. Mullahs reportedly then destroyed the partially constructed building.

In September 2006 Malik Saif ur Rahman, the president of a local Ahmadi organization, completed construction of a small mosque on the property of his farm. The

local mullah objected to police. Later, a contingent of police in plain clothes came and destroyed it.

In September 2006, in two separate incidents, courts based custody decisions on allegations that the Christian mothers would convert their children to Christianity, and so gave custody of the children to their Muslim fathers. The fathers, however, were suspected of kidnapping their children from the ex-wives. In the first case, a Muslim Pakistani man was given custody of his 12-year-old daughter Molly because his ex-wife had reconverted to Christianity. Sajad Ahmed Rana gained custody of Molly after telling courts in Lahore that Molly's mother was living with a man in Scotland she was not married to and was not raising Molly in an Islamic home. Molly disappeared from her school in Scotland and reappeared several days later with her father in Lahore. In the second case, a Muslim man was arrested for kidnapping two children from his ex-wife in 2004. He had kidnapped them during supervised visitation because he was afraid his ex-wife would convert the children to Christianity.

In June 2006, following an attack during which a mob injured two Ahmadis and destroyed their property, Sialkot District police arrested seven Ahmadis and removed 75 from the village for fear of more attacks. Police arrested four Ahmadis for alleged Qur'an desecration. Later, hundreds of persons demonstrated against the alleged desecration and damaged an Ahmadiyya house of worship. Police deployed to avert more damage.

In September 2006 a Sindh district court granted provisional bail for three Ahmadis who had been in hiding, fearing arrests on charges of attempted conversion. Police had previously arrested two other Ahmadis, to whom the higher Sessions Court had granted bail.

In April 2006 an appellate court acquitted a Christian school teacher of blasphemy charges and released him after 5 years in detention.

In November 2005 Catholic Bishop Anthony Lobo alleged that the Government evicted approximately 200 Christians from their homes in Sindh and gave these homes to Muslim victims of the October 2005 earthquake.

In September 2005 in Lahore, Younis Masih, a Christian, confronted an Islamic cleric about loud music accompanying a night time religious ceremony. During the course of their altercation, Masih allegedly insulted Muhammad. Police arrested Masih on charges of blasphemy, and shortly thereafter a mob attacked the Christian community. Masih was sentenced to death by the district court in Lahore on May 30, 2007. The case was on appeal at the end of the reporting period.

There was no action expected in the September 2005 case in which NWFP police arrested a Hindu couple on charges of defiling the Qur'an. The courts released them on bail after each had converted to Islam before officials.

In June 2005 police in NWFP arrested Yousuf Masih, an illiterate Christian janitor on blasphemy charges. Witnesses claimed Masih had burned pages of the Qur'an while disposing of trash for his employer. Police later dropped charges against him; mobs subsequently burned three churches, a convent, and other Christian facilities in the Sangala Hills area. Human rights groups charged that police severely mistreated Masih, which led to a deterioration in his health.

The Government did not subject individuals to forced labor or enslavement based on religious beliefs; however, minority community leaders charged that the Government failed to take adequate action to prevent bonded labor in both the brickmaking and agricultural sectors. Christians and Hindus were disproportionately victims of this practice. In June 2005, police raided sites in Punjab Province, and freed more than 300 mostly Christian workers performing forced labor in brick kilns.

Between July and December 2004, at least eight separate incidents of anti-Ahmadi arrests occurred, many involving blasphemy charges. In most cases, police released the victim or dismissed the charges without trial.

While murder charges were pending against police officers involved in the August 2004 death-in-custody of Nasir Mukhtar, a Christian, no arrests were made during the period covered by this report.

In July 2004 police arrested a Christian girl, who was accused of throwing a copy of the Qur'an into a local dump, and her father. A Muslim mob threatened to burn down the family residence and tried to kill the girl. The two were eventually released and the family moved to ensure their safety.

In July 2004 local government officials in the Bahawalpur District evicted 26 Hindu families and allotted their land to local Muslims.

Following July 2004 protests, police in Chenab Nagar (Rabwah) continued to retain property of the local Ahmadiyya community on which a makeshift mosque had once existed.

Forced Religious Conversion

Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. Religious minorities claimed that Government actions to stem the problem were inadequate. Representatives of the Hindu community in Sindh claim the forced conversion (usually related to familial debts) of 15 to 20 Hindu families per year. Human rights groups have highlighted the increased phenomenon of Hindu girls, particularly in Karachi and other parts of Sindh, being kidnapped from their families by local actors, forced to convert to Islam, and forced to marry their kidnappers. The kidnappers then produce a document claiming the girl is a convert and a willing bride. Since apostasy is a capital offense, the victim is trapped.

In February 2007 a Muslim employer kidnapped two Christian brothers for refusing to convert to Islam and tortured for a month. They eventually escaped and are in hiding.

In May 2007 local religious authorities forced an 86-year-old Christian woman to convert to Islam after her husband was arrested on blasphemy charges.

On December 6, 2006, police in Multan rescued Azra Bibi, whose employer abducted her and tried to force her to convert to Islam and marry him.

Also in December 2006 a tutor kidnapped and forcibly converted a girl to Islam in Tharparkar, Sindh. The tutor backed up his claim with a decree issued by the seminary where he taught. Police refused to register the case despite complaints from the girl's family.

On July 11, 2006, Kenneth Gill, a Christian, age 15, was forced into a mosque in Sheikhupura by Muslim youths. Gill reportedly converted to Islam, only to later claim he was not a willing convert. Local clerics accused him of apostasy and he was arrested. Gill was released on August 7, 2006, and is reported to have moved out of the region.

On June 27, 2006, 13-year-old Pampi Mai, a Christian, was abducted by the family of a Muslim friend she was visiting. The police reluctantly registered the case, but no arrests had been made at the end of the reporting period.

Between August 2004 and June 2006 there were at least seven confirmed cases of abduction and forced conversion. Many of these cases involved severe physical violence and rape of the victims.

There were no reports of forced conversion of minor United States citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

There were several incidents involving the abuse of religious groups carried out by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. Secretary of State under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and by armed sectarian extremist groups with strong links to such organizations.

Nationwide, the sectarian violence situation remained unchanged during the period covered by this report.

Targeted assassinations of clergy remained a key tactic of several groups, including the banned sectarian organization Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP), the terrorist organization Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), and the sectarian organizations Sunni Tehrike (ST) and Sipah-i-Mohammad (SMP). SSP and LJ targeted both Shi'a and Barelvis, whereas ST and SMP targeted Deobandis.

On December 23, 2006, Nazakat Ali Umrani, a professor at the Gomal University Management Sciences Department was shot dead by unidentified gunmen (4 months after his brother was killed) in D.I. Khan. He was a Shi'a.

On December 24, 2006, there was a shooting incident during a funeral in D.I. Khan in which four Sunnis were killed and four were injured. The incident resulted in a day of protests and clashes between Shi'a and Sunni communities in D.I. Khan.

Two unknown gunmen killed a Shi'a leader Jawad Hussain on February 14, 2007, near Chaman Chowk in D.I. Khan.

On March 9, 2007, Syed Anwar Abbas, a Shi'a businessman, was shot and killed outside his shop in D.I. Khan. The brother of Anwar, Moodi Shah, was a Shi'a activist and a former mayor.

On March 13, 2007, Mohammad Farooq, the Sunni prayer leader of Jamia Masjid Kalan mosque and a member of the SSP, was shot and killed while he was on his way to a bazaar in D.I. Khan. On the same day two gunmen opened fire on Hafiz Ishaq, an SSP activist, in his shop. He received critical injuries.

Both LJ and SSP continued attacks on houses of worship and religious gatherings during the period covered by this report.

Al-Qaeda-linked organizations maintained networks in the country, and its supporters periodically issued anti-Semitic and anti-Shi'a statements.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to bolster religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

President Musharraf ordered the release of all women imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinances; few remained in custody, and most were housed in Government-run group homes.

In December 2006 a Supreme Court decision prevented provincial action on the Hasba Bill in the NWFP that would have created a parallel judicial system in that province based on Shari'a.

The Government remained in active negotiations with the wafaq boards, which oversee the vast majority of the country's madrassahs to implement recent registration provisions (see section II).

The Government continued to include human rights awareness as part of its police training program.

The World Council of Religions in Islamabad, assisted by leaders from Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi communities and backed by President Musharraf, continued to organize interfaith dialogue sessions throughout the country. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the Islamic Ideology Council continued to organize smaller intersectarian and interfaith meetings and dialogue sessions. Following these meetings, Deobandi and JI religious and political leaders significantly toned down anti-Christian and anti-Hindu rhetoric.

In May 2007 the Punjab Provincial Education Minister agreed to return property taken from two Associate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) Mission Schools for noneducational use. The Education Minister promised to return 10 primary and secondary schools to ARP's management as quickly as possible.

In early January 2007, two Muslim students at a secular university in Peshawar went to court to stop construction of a Christian church on the grounds of their university. On January 23, 2007, the Peshawar High Court rejected their petition and authorized construction of the church to continue. In their ruling, the justices stated that "Islam guarantees freedom of religion for minorities, there are no legal obstacles to building places of worship, and Pakistan's Constitution protects religious minorities."

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Relations between the country's religious communities remained tense. Violence against religious minorities and between Muslim sects continued. Most believed that a small minority were responsible for attacks; however, discriminatory laws and the teaching of religious intolerance created a permissive environment for attacks. Police often refused to prevent violence and harassment or refused to charge persons who commit such offenses.

Mobs occasionally attacked individuals accused of blasphemy, their family, or their religious community prior to their arrest. When blasphemy and other religious cases were brought to court, extremists often packed the courtroom and made public threats against an acquittal. Religious extremists continued to threaten to kill those acquitted of blasphemy charges. High-profile accused persons often went into hiding or emigrated after acquittal.

On April 8, 2007, local extremists tortured and killed Chaudhry Habibullah Sial, an 82-year-old Ahmadi man who was using his home as a prayer center for Ahmadis.

On March 1, 2007, a former police officer killed Mohammed Ashraf, an Ahmadi, because Ashraf changed his religion from Sunni to Ahmadi. The killer claimed to have done nothing wrong and that he followed Islamic law, since apostasy is punishable by death.

In November 2006 two Ahmadi men in Bagar Sargana were attacked by a mob on their way home after Friday prayers.

In October 2006 an Ahmadi imam at a mosque in Chawinda was attacked in his apartment in the mosque complex.

In September 2006 Professor Abdul Basit, an Ahmadi, was attacked in his home in Dera Ghazi Khan.

On August 22, 2006, Munawwar Ahmad Sahib, an Ahmadi, was killed by two gunmen in his home in Gujrat.

In August 2006 an Ahmadi youth, Etzaz Ahmad, was attacked in the shop where he worked as an apprentice. The attacker said he was trying to kill an infidel.

Ahmadi individuals and institutions long have been victims of religious violence, much of which organized religious extremists instigated. Ahmadi leaders charged that in previous years militant Sunni mullahs and their followers staged sometimes violent anti-Ahmadi 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 denounced Ahmadis and their founder, a situation that sometimes led to violence. The Ahmadis claimed that police generally were present during these marches but did not intervene to prevent violence. In contrast with the previous report, there were no such reports during this reporting period.

Violence against and harassment of Christians continued during the period covered by this report. Many Christians, descended from low-cast Hindu ancestors, faced discrimination more for ethnic and social reasons than religious.

On May 7, 2007, several Christian communities in the NWFP received letters allegedly from Muslim fundamentalists claiming that they must convert to Islam within 10 days or face dire consequences, including death and bombings of homes and churches. A teenager admitted to writing the letter as a "prank," and religious leaders accepted his apology.

In April 2007 a Muslim claimed Christian boys took a sticker from his nephew with the name Muhammad on it, threw it on the ground, and trampled it. This enflamed a group of Muslims celebrating the Prophet's birthday, and they attacked the Christians, injuring dozens and badly beating a crippled man.

In April 2007 a 12-year-old Christian girl was kidnapped and raped near Lahore on Easter Day. She was held for 4 days before she was returned to her family. Officials would not file a first information report against her four attackers because doctors allegedly refused to provide a medical report.

In January 2007 Voice of the Martyrs-Canada reported that Islamic militants attacked a team of four Christians at a Muslim festival in Pakpattan for distributing Christian tracts.

On December 25, 2006, three Muslim residents in the village of Nanghal Sahdhaan near Lahore attacked a Catholic church and tried to set it on fire. The same men attempted to interrupt a service a week earlier. The priest reported the incident to police, who went to their homes but were unable to locate the men.

In December 2006 a Muslim couple in Sialkot released a mother and daughter they had imprisoned and tortured for 3 months. The couple tried to force them to convert from Christianity to Islam. The mother and daughter refused and were eventually released with the assistance of the court system.

On November 12, 2006, a mob of drunken Muslims wielding clubs and guns attacked the congregation of the Nazarene Church in the village of Talab Sarai.

In October 2006 a Muslim teacher beat a 15-year-old Christian school girl in Kasur because the girl wore a cross to school and forced her to stand outside in the hot sun until she fainted.

In August 2006 police arrested four Muslim men who attacked a group of Christian women and children, destroyed a church with a grenade, and set two nearby houses on fire. Muslim neighbors assisted the women and children and helped drive the attackers away.

In August 2006 a man attacked his niece because she converted to Christianity. She escaped and went into hiding.

On August 7, 2006, bulldozers from a local factory destroyed the Awami Church in the village of Mominpura Thiaki. A local priest complained to the Government, and the factory offered the congregation money to rebuild.

In July 2006 a young Christian woman went into hiding to avoid further physical abuse by her Muslim husband and in-laws for refusing to practice Islam. The woman's older brother had tried to force her to convert to Islam and arranged a marriage in which he told her husband-to-be that she had converted. Her husband beat and raped her daily for 2 months for refusing to read the Qur'an.

Hindus faced societal violence, often directed at their temples, during the period covered by this report. Criminals targeted Hindu businessmen for kidnap, particularly in Karachi. Hindus claimed they were forced to pay ransoms since police did little to recover kidnap victims.

Societal violence against the Sikh community remained comparatively rare.

Ismailis reported that they were the objects of resentment of Sunni Muslims due to their comparative economic well being. Ismailis reported they frequently faced societal pressure to adopt conservative Muslim practices or risk being ostracized socially.

Although there were very few Jewish citizens in the country, anti-Semitic articles were common in the vernacular press.

Some Sunni Muslim groups published literature calling for violence against Ahmadis, Shi'a Muslims, other Sunni sects, and Hindus. Some newspapers frequently published articles that contained derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews. Sermons at mosques frequently railed against religious minorities.

In July 2007 Pakistan Army and security forces launched a military operation against the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) in Islamabad which resulted in the deaths of 10 security forces and approximately 79 militants, including the mosque's leader. From March through June, militants who took over the mosque and its adjoining girls' madrassah kidnapped brothel owners, policemen and foreign massage parlor workers. Fighting erupted when militants fired upon security forces attempting to cordon off the mosque. The confrontation prompted the Government to renew its efforts to curb the teaching of extremism in madrassahs across the country.

In May 2007 Islamic clerics and students at Islamabad's Red Mosque captured and held several policemen hostage for 4 days at a conservative seminary associated with the mosque. The same month, women associated with the seminary kidnapped and held three women accused of running a brothel. In June 2007, extremists from the mosque kidnapped and later released six Chinese workers and two Pakistanis at an acupuncture/massage clinic.

In April 2007 more than 100 Shi'a and Sunnis died and many more were injured in sectarian violence which lasted for 2 weeks. The fighting began in Parachinar and spread throughout the Kurram Tribal Area. At the end of the reporting period, a fragile ceasefire existed between the two groups.

In April 2007 gunmen killed two Shi'a men and their Sunni employer in an episode of sectarian violence in the NWFP. One victim, a lawyer and leader of a local political party, had been receiving threats for several months. The same article reported that between January and March 2007, at least eight Shi'a were killed in sectarian violence in the same city. Following each attack, mobs destroyed markets and kept businesses closed.

In February 2007 Muslim clerics sent death threats to a Catholic bishop and two Muslims in Faisalabad, after attending an interfaith program which promoted social harmony and peace.

In January 2007 during the Shi'a festival of Ashura, at least two suicide bombers attacked Shi'a gatherings and two rockets were launched at a Shi'a mosque in Bannu. The Christian Science Monitor reported at least 21 were killed and 40 were injured in the attacks, which were suspected to be sectarian in nature.

Discrimination in employment based on religion appeared widespread. Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists stated that the situation had improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years.

During the reporting period, the majority of bonded laborers in agriculture and the brick kiln industry sectors were non-Muslim.

Throughout the reporting period, attacks, threats, and violence by Islamic extremists increased across Pakistan, but especially in the NWFP. The origin was perceived to be from the influence of the Taliban coming across the border from neighboring Afghanistan.

In May 2007 Tourism Minister Nilofar Bakhtiar was forced to resign after criticism from hardline Islamic clerics. She was photographed in April 2007 hugging an elderly man after completing a paragliding flight to raise money for charity. The clerics considered her public display of affection to be obscene.

Throughout the reporting period, Islamic extremists attacked shops in the NWFP and FATA which sold local and foreign music and video cassettes. Shop owners were warned prior to attacks to stop selling items considered to be un-Islamic. In at least one case, those arrested were Muslim clerics.

In February 2007 two public high schools for girls in the NWFP received threats of attack unless its female students and teachers began wearing veils and burqas. *AsiaNews* reported that Islamic extremists gave the schools 1 week to conform with "Islamic norms" or they would be bombed. Both schools were closed.

Between July 2005 and June 2006 Ahmadis and Christians were the primary targets of religious attack in Pakistan. One Ahmadi was killed, and an Islamic cleric refused to allow the remains of an Ahmadi girl to remain in a Muslim graveyard. Christians faced arson attacks upon their churches, and following the publication of cartoons of Mohammed in the Danish press, at least six Christian institutions were attacked, and one pastor was kidnapped and tortured.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Embassy officers maintained a dialogue with Government, religious, and minority community representatives to encourage religious freedom and to discuss the blasphemy laws, the Hudood Ordinances, curriculum reform in the public education and madrassah education systems, treatment of the Ahmadiyya and Christian communities, and sectarian violence. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met with leaders from communities of all religious groups and NGOs working on reli-

gious freedom problems. Embassy officials also raised and discussed treatment of the Ahmadis with Members of Parliament.

As part of its overall public education reform program, valued at $100 million (6 billion rupees), the United States provided substantial financial support to the Government's curriculum reform initiative, which included eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance.

SRI LANKA

The Constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," but Buddhism is not recognized as the state religion. The Constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to freely practice their religion. While the Government publicly endorses this right, in practice there were problems in some areas.

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

Parliament has not taken action on anti-conversion legislation first introduced in 2004. In May 2004, the Jathika Hela Urumaya Party (JHU) presented to Parliament a bill that would criminalize "unethical" conversions and on May 6, 2005, the JHU presented the bill for a second reading, despite a Supreme Court ruling that some sections of the bill were unconstitutional. Subsequently, the proposed bill was referred to a special parliamentary committee, which met for the first time in April 2006. The bill remained under consideration within the committee at the end of the period covered by this report.

Since late 2003, the country has witnessed a spate of attacks on Christian churches and on pastors and congregants. More than 300 attacks have been alleged since 2003, with several dozen confirmed by the U.S. Embassy. In response, major political and religious leaders have publicly condemned the attacks, and police have arrested and prosecuted approximately a dozen persons in connection with the incidents.

There were sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and some societal tension due to ongoing allegations of forced conversions and debate on anticonversion legislation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials conveyed U.S. Government concerns about church attacks to Government leaders and urged them to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators. Embassy officials also expressed concern to the Government about the negative impact anticonversion laws could have on religious freedom. The U.S. Government continued to discuss general religious freedom concerns with religious leaders.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 25,322 square miles and a population of 19.4 million. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are practiced. Approximately 70 percent of the population is Buddhist, 15 percent Hindu, 8 percent Christian, and 7 percent Muslim. Christians tend to be concentrated in the west, with much of the east populated by Muslims and the north almost exclusively by Hindus.

Most members of the majority Sinhala community are Theravada Buddhists. Most Tamils, who make up the largest ethnic minority, are Hindu. Almost all Muslims are Sunnis; there is also a small minority of Shi'a, including members of the Borah community. Almost 80 percent of Christians are Roman Catholics, with Anglican and other mainstream Protestant churches also present in the cities. Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Anglicans, Pentecostal, and the Assemblies of God are also present. Evangelical Christian groups have grown in recent years, although membership is still 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 religious groups to practice their religions freely. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has four departments, one each to deal with Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian affairs. According to the legislation defining their mandates, each department should formulate and implement programs that inculcate religious values and promote a virtuous society.

In May 2004, the JHU proposed a "Prohibition of Forcible Conversions" bill before Parliament. The bill carries penalties, including fines or jail sentences, for anyone convicted of or assisting in "unethical" conversion, with heavier penalties for converting women and children. In August 2004, the Supreme Court found key parts of the bill to be unconstitutional, but upheld sections that would criminalize forced conversion, conversion by deceit, or conversion by "allurement." On May 6, 2005, the JHU presented the same bill, without amendments, for its second reading. The bill was referred to a parliamentary standing committee for review. The standing committee has 6 months from the date of its composition to consider the bill and any proposed amendments to it. In April 2006 the Speaker of Parliament appointed the members of the standing committee, composed of seven Buddhists, six Christians, five Hindus, and two Muslims. At the end of the reporting period, the committee continued to hear testimony from religious and civil society leaders.

Despite the constitutional preference for Buddhism, a number of major religious festivals of other faiths are celebrated as national holidays. These include the Hindu Thai Pongal, New Year, and Deepawali festivals; the Muslim Hadji and Ramzan festivals and the Prophet Muhammad's birthday; and Christian Good Friday and Christmas.

Some Christian denominations resisted greater Government involvement in their affairs; as a result, they were allowed to register through acts of parliament or as corporations under domestic law. Any religious group that wishes to register as a corporation must submit forms to do so. Registration gives a group legal standing as a corporate entity in financial and real estate transactions. There was no tax exemption for religious organizations as such; however, churches and temples were allowed to register as charitable organizations, which were entitled to some tax exemptions. There was no option for registering as a "religious group."

Religion is a mandatory subject in the public school curriculum. Parents and children may choose whether a child studies Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity. Students of other religious groups can pursue religious instruction outside of the public school system, since no instruction is provided for other religions. Schools teach religion from an academic point of view. Most private schools follow curricula similar to public schools because all students must take national exams administered by the Government.

Matters related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance, were adjudicated according to the customary law of the concerned ethnic or religious group. The minimum age of marriage for women is 18 years, except in the case of Muslims, who continued to follow their customary religious practices of girls attaining marrying age with the onset of puberty and men when they are financially capable of supporting a family.

The application of different legal practices based on membership in a religious or ethnic group may result in discrimination against women.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Foreign clergy may work in the country, but for the last 3 decades the Government has limited the issuance of temporary work permits. Permission to work was usually restricted to denominations that were registered formally with the Government. Most religious workers in the country were indigenous.

The Government limited the number of foreign religious workers granted temporary residence permits.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Since 1983 the Government has fought the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a terrorist organization fighting for a separate state for the country's Tamil minority. In 2001, the Government and the LTTE each announced unilateral ceasefires, and in 2002 they agreed to a joint ceasefire accord. The peace process stalled in late 2005 following an escalation in violence. In 2006 renewed fighting broke out between the two sides. Religion did not play a significant role in the conflict, which was rooted in linguistic, ethnic, and political differences. Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians all have been affected by the conflict, which has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1983. The military issued warnings through public radio before commencing major operations, instructing civilians to congregate in safe zones around churches and temples. The Government, paramilitaries, and Tamil Tigers have been accused of involving religious facilities in the conflict or putting them at risk through shelling in conflict areas.

During the reporting period, human rights abuses were committed against individuals at places of worship in the north and east. While these incidents had an impact on religious freedom, they were not religiously motivated; instead, they were a product of the conflict situation.

On January 13, 2007, Reverend Nallathamby Gnanaseelan of the Tamil Mission Church of Jaffna was shot and killed by Government security forces. Security personnel confiscated the deceased pastor's Bible, bag, and motorcycle. Government officials stated that the pastor had attempted to hurl a grenade at the security forces, although congregants insisted that the pastor was on his way to his church to conduct a fasting and prayer event. There was no evidence to indicate that his killing was religiously motivated.

Throughout 2006 there was an increase in the number of reported disappearances because of the conflict. Some Catholic priests who spoke out on humanitarian issues were among those who disappeared. On August 20, 2006, Father Thiruchchelvan Nihal Jim Brown and his assistant, Wenceslaus Vinces Vimalathas, disappeared after six armed men on motorbikes followed them from a security forces checkpoint near the village of Allaipiddy on Kayts Island, a predominantly Catholic neighborhood off the Jaffna peninsula. Father Brown had been at the church of St. Philip Neri when a firefight broke out on August 13, 2006, between the Navy and the LTTE, leaving 15 civilians dead and at least 54 injured. Human Rights Watch claimed he had been receiving death threats from senior Navy personnel. Local press reported that DNA tests completed at the Ragama General Hospital in Colombo confirmed that a mutilated torso found near Pungkudutheevu Island on March 14, 2007, packed in a military sand bag, belonged to Father Brown. However, in June 2007 the Ministry Foreign Affairs stated that the DNA results had confirmed the body was not Father Brown. There was no evidence that his killing was religiously motivated.

On June 17, 2006, in Pesalai, Government troops were accused of storming a church, Our Lady of Victory, and opening fire where hundreds of civilians, including both Christian and Hindu Tamils, were seeking shelter from an exchange of fire between the Government and the LTTE.

On May 6, 2006, eight Tamil men were abducted from a Hindu temple in the north; this incident was also likely politically motivated. The men had been decorating the temple for a religious festival; they were reported missing on May 7, 2006, and their whereabouts were unknown at the end of the period covered by this report. Eyewitnesses said Army personnel were in the temple from early morning on May 7, and they had seen the eight men being taken away by Army personnel. Next-of-kin of the eight abducted men have registered complaints with the Human Rights Commission in Jaffna, the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Extra-Judicial Killings, and Amnesty International but no action has been taken.

On December 24, 2005, Joseph Pararajasingham, a Member of Parliament for the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and a Christian, was assassinated while attending midnight mass at a church in Batticaloa in the east. His killing was assumed to be politically motivated.

The police investigated many incidents of attacks and harassment against Christians when complaints were made. Occasionally the police were reluctant to pursue criminal charges against the suspected perpetrators, some of whom were Buddhist monks. Law enforcement officials believed that a majority of the attacks were conducted by a small number of extremist Buddhists.

In 2003 Brother Manoharan, a member of the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission, was arrested in connection with the death of an 11-year-old girl. The young girl, who had been sick, was prayed for by Brother Manoharan. He, along with the victim's parents, were taken into police custody on charges of "culpable homicide," tantamount to manslaughter. The three were released on bail on June 2, 2006, and a hearing was set for July 28, 2006. Brother Manoharan died of natural causes in November 2006. The local magistrate courts postponed the court case, and the Attorney General did not file charges against the deceased child's parents.

In May 2006 the pastor of the Godagama Prayer Centre in a Colombo suburb, Maharagama, was threatened by a local Buddhist monk-led mob to stop services. When he went to the police, he was told he should stop the services if the people of the area did not like it.

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.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

The LTTE has been listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States since 1997. While Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians all have been

victimized by the LTTE, religious persecution has not played a major role in the conflict.

In 1990 the LTTE expelled some 46,000 Muslim inhabitants—virtually the entire Muslim population—from their homes in the northern part of the island. Most of these persons remained displaced and lived 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 were credible reports that the LTTE warned thousands of Muslims displaced from the Mannar area not to return to their homes until the conflict was over. It appears that the LTTE's actions against Muslims were not due to Muslims' religious beliefs, but rather that they were part of an overall strategy to clear the north and east of persons unsympathetic to the LTTE. The LTTE made some conciliatory statements to the Muslim community, but many Muslims viewed the statements with skepticism. The LTTE continued to encourage Muslim internally displaced persons (IDPs) in some areas to return home, asserting they would not be harmed. Although some Muslim IDPs returned home, the vast majority did not and instead waited for a Government guarantee of safety in LTTE-controlled areas. Since the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, the LTTE also carried out a number of attacks in the east in which Muslims have been killed. No arrests were made in these cases by the end of the period covered by this report.

In February 2007 BBC News reported Hindu priest Selliah Parameswar Kurukkal Parameshwara was taken from his home in eastern Batticaloa and killed. Only a few days before, he had met the President Rajapaksa in Vakarai and blessed him in the Hindu tradition in a public ceremony. Government security forces had taken Parameshwara to Vakarai to greet the President following the military's defeat of LTTE forces there. The LTTE were suspected in his death, and there was no evidence that this killing was religiously motivated.

On May 17, 2005, during an LTTE-sponsored strike over the erection of a Buddha statue on public land in Trincomalee in the eastern province, a Sinhala youth was killed, and four members of the same family were injured when a grenade was thrown at them. On May 18, 2005, the Trincomalee magistrate instructed the authorities to remove the Buddha statue. On June 17, 2005, the court of appeals in Colombo issued a suspension of that order. On April 7, 2006, an unidentified gunman shot and killed Mr. Vigneswaran, organizer of the LTTE-sponsored strike over the Buddha statue, for unknown reasons. At the end of the period covered by this report, the statue remained at the contested site.

On April 24, 2005, the chief priest of Annapani Hindu temple at Ariyampathi in Batticaloa was shot, allegedly by an armed LTTE gang, while attending to religious activities in the temple. The priest and two others were admitted to Batticaloa hospital with serious injuries. The police continued their investigation during the period covered by this report, but because the area was controlled by the LTTE, no other action was taken.

The LTTE has been accused of using church and temple compounds, where civilians were instructed by the Government to congregate in the event of hostilities, as shields for the storage of munitions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination based on religious differences was much less common than discrimination based on ethnicity. In general, members of the various faiths tended to be tolerant of each other's religious beliefs. Harassment of Christians and attacks on their property and places of worship by Buddhist extremists opposed to conversion continued during the period covered by this report. Some leaders of different faiths publicly condemned these attacks. Some minority Islamic sects also faced discrimination, harassment, and threats on places of worship and on persons from some members of the majority Sunni Islamic community in Sri Lanka. Police generally provided protection for these groups at their request.

On May 18, 2007, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Negombo asked for and received local police protection at their mosque following threats from Sunni Muslims to take over the mosque, and Friday prayers passed without incident.

On May 11, 2007, a group of Sunni Muslims had come to the Ahmadi mosque in Negombo and held prayers there, barring the Ahmadi group from entering. Police were present on the scene but reported they did not want to use force to disperse the crowd inside the mosque.

In October 2006 the Ahmadiyya community had reported that the Sunni group had instructed the State media not to give any publicity to the minority Ahmadis, accusing them of being apostates. The Ahmadiyya group lodged complaints against a Sunni group for allegedly killing one of their members on October 14, 2006, and

assaulting Pakistani Ahmadi Muslims in Negombo on October 9. Local police did not take any action on any of these cases during the reporting period.

During the period covered by this report, Christians, both of mainstream denominations and evangelical groups, sometimes encountered harassment and physical attacks on property and places of worship by some local Buddhists who believed they were threatened by these groups and were opposed to conversion. Some Christian groups occasionally complained that the Government tacitly condoned harassment and violence aimed at them. In some cases police response was inadequate, and local police officials reportedly were reluctant to take legal action against individuals involved in the attacks.

The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) stated that during the reporting period, there were 39 attacks on Christian churches, organizations, religious leaders, or congregants, 90 percent of which were reported to the police. Credible sources confirmed some of these attacks.

Allegations by Buddhist extremists of Christian involvement in "unethical" or forced conversions continued to be a source of tension between the two communities. Christians denied this charge, responding that people undergo conversion of their own free will. There were reports that members of some evangelical groups made disparaging comments about Buddhism while evangelizing. Some groups also alleged that Christians engaged in aggressive proselytism and took advantage of societal ills such as general poverty, war, and lack of education. Christians countered that their relief efforts were not targeted at converting aid beneficiaries.

On February 11, 2007, the congregation of the Christian Centre of Bandaragama in Colombo district was meeting for Sunday morning worship when unknown persons began throwing stones at the hall where they were praying. A roofing sheet was damaged, but there were no injuries. Previously, on December 10, 2006, the windows of the hall had been smashed and destroyed. On December 24, anti-Christian posters had appeared in the area. The church lodged a police complaint about the incident of the rocks being hurled at the church.

On February 9, 2007, several areas in the district of Polonnaruwa reported persons were traveling in a vehicle with loudspeakers, calling people to gather for a meeting to chase away Christians. The Christians in the area expressed concern that the meeting might turn violent. The meeting was held as planned at a Buddhist temple in the Polonnaruwa town area, with approximately 150 persons in attendance. Police presence ensured that no violence occurred. However, the meeting participants decided to strongly advise the Christian clergy to resign and stop Christian activity in the region, or "face consequences for which the organizers of the protest would not be responsible."

In January 2007 the Supreme Court chose to delay its decision on a fundamental rights violation petition filed by the chief prelate of a Buddhist temple in Colombo against allegedly offensive images of Buddha imported into the country. The petition cited the Inspector General of Police, the Director General of Customs, the Attorney General, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs as respondents. The Supreme Court did not state when it would rule on the petition.

On December 17, 2006, the Pastor of the Dev Niwasa (Home of God) Church was asleep in his partially constructed house when five men broke into the house and assaulted him. The attackers destroyed the electricity connection, a motorcycle, and other belongings. The attackers then set fire to the house and forced the pastor into a vehicle. They drove him away, beat him, and verbally abused him, demanding that he stop his Christian ministry. He was thrown out of the vehicle some distance away. The pastor complained to the Gokarella Police on December 18, 2006, but police made no arrests by the end of the reporting period. The Pastor reports suffering from impaired vision due to the beating.

On December 7, 2006, the burial of M.S. Abdulla Pailvaan, a leader of a Sufi Muslim sect called the All Island Tharikathul Muffiheen (AITM), at a mosque triggered 9 days of violent clashes with other Muslim sects in Kathankudy in Batticaloa District. The Kattankudy Jammiyathul Ulema (Board of Theologians) said that they had served an edict of Murthath (non-Muslim) on the deceased leader for preaching unorthodox religious practices and promoting pantheism. A Muslim judge held inquiries into Pailvaan's burial and ordered that his remains be exhumed and interred in the common Muslim Burial grounds. The judge also directed police to take down the tower of the Sufi sect's prayer center because it violated building height restrictions. Following the judgment, a group of Sunni Muslims attacked the Sufi mosque, killing two AITM members, injuring many more, and damaging several thousands of dollars worth of Government and private property. To resolve the conflict, the AITM exhumed the body of their leader and buried him at a public cemetery.

On November 22, 2006, unidentified persons bombed the Lighthouse Church located in Mawatura, Gampola in Kandy District and injured a church worker. Rocks

shattered the front window and came through the roof. The employee was rushed to a local hospital for treatment. The pastor lodged a complaint with the police.

On November 12, 2006, in Anamaduwa in Puttalam District, four members of the Prayer Tower church were returning from a funeral service when they were accosted by several men, who beat and stoned them. When the pastor of the church reported the incident to the police, the attackers accused the church of disturbing the neighbors with loud worship. The pastor countered that many of the neighbors were Christians and the worship service was only 1 hour long each week. The police intervened on the pastor's behalf, and the attackers promised to not harass the church members again.

On November 12, 2006, the Mizpah Prayer Ministry congregation in Nawalapitiya gathered for worship when a mob disrupted the service and demanded that it be stopped immediately. The mob, including 12 Buddhist monks, a member of the local government, and two journalists from local newspapers, chased away the congregation. The mob threatened the pastor with death. The group later revisited the church and threatened the workers there. One of the attackers hit a church worker with a club, and others broke chairs. The church filed a formal complaint with local police, who made no arrests during the reporting period.

On November 8, 2006, an unidentified gang armed with rifles arrived in a van and stormed an office situated at the Al-Jumma mosque in Baduliya in the eastern town of Kattankudy. The gang shot indiscriminately at a group of persons in the office, and six individuals sustained injuries as a result. Katankudy police believed the shooting was based on an unsettled dispute between two Muslim religious factions in the area, due to an earlier clash at the same mosque.

On October 30, 2006, a group of local men accosted the pastor of Calvary Chapel of Lanka in Polhena, Matara. Two to three men beat the pastor while the others looked on. The pastor was hospitalized for his injuries as a result. He made a complaint to Matara police.

On October 29, 2006, the congregation of the Assembly of God church in Yakkala in the Gampaha District met for worship. A group of approximately 50 Buddhists, including 4 local monks, arrived at the service and demanded that it be stopped. The monks told the pastor that there was no need for a Christian church in the Buddhist village. To prevent violence, the pastor agreed to cancel the service for that week. The mob demanded that he permanently close the church or face serious consequences. The pastor filed a complaint with the police, who agreed to provide protection to the congregation. However, on Sunday, November 12, mobs gathered again on the roads leading to the church. Anti-Christian posters were put up, and over 100 Buddhist protestors, some armed with clubs, prevented the Christians from attending services. The pastor called the police, but only two officers arrived and were unable to control the crowd. Police called further reinforcements and eventually dispersed the mob. On November 13, a man threw a container of black oil on a young woman who was visiting the pastor's home. She lodged a complaint with the Gampaha police.

On October 23, 2006, a church worker and his family at the Vineyard Community Church in the city of Gonawela, Kurunegala, were attacked by five men claiming to be police officers. The men threatened the family, beat the man with clubs, and aggressively shook a child. They also stole a gold necklace, damaged the building's electricity supply, and smashed pots and vases. The beaten man sustained serious internal injuries. On October 30, 10 men again attacked the Vineyard Community Church. They unsuccessfully tried to set the building on fire. No one was injured in this attack. Church members filed a complaint to the Pannala police, but they made no arrests during the reporting period.

NCEASL reported that on October 13, 2006, a prayer center in Hingurakgoda, Polonnaruwa was vandalized and set on fire. Unidentified assailants stole a keyboard, carpet, and mats; desecrated the interior of the building with human waste; then set fire to Bibles and hymnals. The pastor filed a complaint with the police, who were investigating.

In October 2006 an anonymous group sent threatening letters to most Catholic and Christian schools in Colombo demanding the cancellation of all Christmas programs. The group identified itself as an organization caring for children. Some schools reported receiving anonymous telephone calls warning that stern action would be taken against those schools that conducted Christmas programs. One threatening letter addressed to a Catholic school said that children should sacrifice Christmas fanfare and instead donate money to the security forces serving in the north and east. The schools held the Christmas programs in spite of these threats and there were no repercussions.

In August 2006 posters began appearing in Balana Kadugannawa demanding that the Dutch Reformed Church stop renovation work on a local orphanage. According

to NCEASL, approximately 200 persons forced their way into the orphanage premises and began destroying the property. A Buddhist flag was hoisted on the roof. In September 2006 the Divisional Council revoked the license it had issued for the renovation work without indicating due cause. Church members filed a complaint with local police.

On July 1, 2006, a mob attacked the Harvest International Church in Hapugastenne in Ratnapura district. Attackers smashed and looted property and seriously injured two church workers, one of whom required minor surgery. The mob threatened to kill the pastor and his family if they did not shut down the church. The pastor filed a complaint with local police, who were investigating the case but had made no arrests by the end of the reporting period.

In June 2006 the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) of Sri Lanka, a private association, appointed a commission of inquiry to report on the strategies and funding of conversion of Buddhists to other religions. The officials of the ACBC intend to publish the report before the end of 2007.

In May 2006 the pastor of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Gampola, Kandy received a death threat. Shortly thereafter, a local social welfare officer and three Buddhist monks insisted the pastor go to the police station with them. At the station, the pastor showed his official ID and a copy of his church's incorporation act. The police strongly advised the welfare officer and the monks not to further harass the pastor; however, when the pastor sought a copy of his official complaint regarding the death threat, police were unresponsive. When Foursquare Gospel Church headquarters in Colombo raised the incident with local police contacts, they were informed there was no record of the pastor's complaint. The pastor deemed it too dangerous to continue meeting at the Gampola location, and congregants met elsewhere during the course of the reporting period.

On May 2, 2006, the United Christian Fellowship began constructing a community hall on land it purchased in Poddala in the Galle District. On May 6, 2006, a mob led by a Buddhist monk entered the premises and threatened the construction worker and the pastor. The worker was grabbed by his collar, and both he and the pastor were verbally abused. The mob threatened to demolish the building or set fire to it if a church were constructed, although the pastor explained the building was meant to be a community center. The pastor reported the incident to local police. Construction stopped and has not resumed. Threats continued over the reporting period and the work did not resume.

On April 23, 2006, a Methodist Church in Pilyandala reopened for the first time since 2003, when threats from Buddhist monks caused the church to close. At the reopening, the same group of monks led a mob who damaged congregants' vehicles. On April 30, 2006, burning tires were placed on the road outside the church. A court hearing was scheduled for June 16,2006. After three court sittings, the Magistrate warned and discharged both parties. Congregants who lost property and vehicles filed separate cases to seek compensation. The church is no longer functioning because a group of villagers led by some local Buddhist monks continued to create obstacles.

On February 14, 2006, a pastor from Alpitiya was summoned to the police station, where a crowd of approximately 80 persons including five Buddhist monks accused him of conducting unethical conversions. He was told not to gather congregants for prayers. The mob threatened him and hit him with an umbrella in police presence. Later that day, the mob attempted to storm the pastor's house. The pastor fled with his wife and children and alerted the police, who arrived and dispersed the crowd. Throughout February 2006, the pastor faced harassment including death threats and a poster campaign threatening anyone who helped the pastor or his family. Congregants faced harassment when they visited the pastor. In March 2006, a family that had sheltered the threatened pastor and his family during a previous tense situation, found burnt oil and human excrement thrown at their house. On March 22, 2006, after an investigation into their children's illness, the same family discovered that their well had been contaminated with trickle seeds and burnt oil. The family filed a complaint with the police. The congregation has not been meeting and the pastor no longer conducts services. A police inquiry did not result in any arrests. Police advised congregants to stop meeting, and the church is no longer functioning.

On January 22, 2006, in Bolaththa in the Gampaha District, a group of churchgoers faced a large mob including Buddhist monks and a Catholic priest. The mob carried placards and shouted threats, demanding that church services be stopped. The mob insisted that the pastor only accept Christians from his own village into his church, and under duress, the pastor agreed. On January 23, 2006, the pastor's house was stoned. On February 12, 2006, the mob monitored church attendees and discovered the church organist came from a neighboring village. The mob grew threatening, and the pastor called the police. Police dispersed the crowd, but asked

the pastor to limit services to congregants within his own village. The pastor has not conducted regular Sunday services since then. During this reporting period, the pastor and congregants met for services at another location.

On December 25, 2005, parishioners of the King's Revival Church in Alawwa in the Kurunegala District were attacked on their way to services. Four persons were injured. Police arrived on the scene immediately after being informed of the attack and the mob was dispersed. Soon after the attack, oil was dumped in the pastor's drinking well, and on January 16, 2006, assailants threw stones at the pastor's home, breaking a window. On January 26, 2007, a court ruled in favor of the church, which continues functioning in the same location.

On the evening of June 5, 2005, villagers threw bottles at the newly purchased home of the pastor of the Assembly of God church in Ambalangoda in Galle District. On June 6, following an argument between a mob of approximately 30 and the pastor, the mob attacked the pastor's home, damaging the windows and fence. The mob, which later grew to more than 50 persons, assaulted the pastor and his brother and stole the pastor's mobile telephone and more than $2,000 (200,000 rupees) from him. The home also was vandalized and a Buddha statue and lamps were placed on the property. Police investigated, promptly removed the statue and lamps, and arrested six persons who remained free on bail at the end of the period covered by this report. The initial hearing was held in January 2006. The pastor reported that subsequently stones were thrown at his house, and villagers occupying the building he meant to use as a community center stopped him from using the facility. The accused approached the pastor and asked to settle out of court, promising to allow him to continue his work peacefully. The pastor asked that any settlement be agreed upon before a Magistrate and recorded in the Court. On April 27, 2007, a judge ordered the illegal occupants of the premises slated for the community center to vacate the area and remove fences they had built. However, the pastor reported he is still too frightened to reclaim his land from the unlawful residents.

In December 2004 St. Michael's Catholic Church in Kutwana was set on fire. This was the third attack against the church since 2003. Police made no arrests during the period covered by this report. During the reporting period, police provided a guard for congregants who meet in the restored church building for services.

In 2004 a large crowd attacked an Apostolic church in Kurunegala. The church and workers' quarters were burned. Five men were arrested but remained free on bail at the end of the period covered by this report. A hearing on this case was scheduled for July 2005. The attackers sought to settle out of court. The church agreed to a settlement on condition that the attackers accept fault for the incident. The church also filed a civil suit seeking compensation for damages. The next hearing was due in May 2007, though several hearings have been postponed.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials regularly meet with representatives of all the country's religious groups to review a wide range of human rights, ethnic, and religious freedom concerns. During the period covered by this report, Embassy representatives met with Government officials at the highest level to express U.S. Government concern about the attacks on Christian churches and to discuss the anticonversion issue. On several occasions, the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed the anticonversion issue with the country's Ambassador to the United States.

The U.S. Government is a strong supporter of a political solution to the conflict, and the U.S. Embassy supports interfaith efforts by religious leaders to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

TAJIKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were some areas of concern.

The status of respect for religious freedom eroded during the period covered by this report. Government policies reflected a concern about Islamic extremism, a concern shared by much of the general population. The Government actively monitored the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political. There were no closures of officially registered mosques, although the Government closed several unregistered mosques, prayer rooms, and madrassahs, and made the

registration process to establish new mosques difficult. A Ministry of Education policy prohibited girls from wearing the hijab at public schools. The Government used the registration process to hinder some organizations' religious activity. Some religious organizations and individuals faced harassment, temporary detention, and interrogation by Government authorities. The Government, including President Emomali Rahmon, continued to enunciate a policy of active secularism.

Some mainstream Muslim leaders occasionally expressed, through sermons and press articles, their opinion 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 among and within religious groups through public diplomacy efforts. In addition, Embassy staff, including the Ambassador and visiting U.S. Government officials met regularly with community leaders of different confessions. Embassy staff investigated instances of potential discrimination and advocated strongly for Government tolerance of all religious groups. The U.S. Embassy also supported exchange programs for Tajik religious leaders to visit the United States.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,300 square miles and a population of 7 million, although it is difficult to determine an accurate figure due to absence of birth registrations in some rural areas. An estimated 97 percent of citizens consider themselves Muslims, although the degree of religious observance varies widely. Overall, active observance of Islam appears to be increasing steadily, especially among previously less observant city residents. The vast majority of Muslim inhabitants (approximately 96 percent of the population) are of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. Approximately 1 percent of Muslims are Shi'a, the majority of whom are Ismailis. Most Ismailis reside in the remote eastern Gorno-Badakhshan region as well as certain districts of the southern Khatlon region and in Dushanbe, the capital. In 2006 a new unregistered Islamic group of the Salafi sect began worshipping in Friday mosques in Dushanbe, Sughd, and Khatlon. An estimated 5,000 Salafis practice in Dushanbe without interference from other Muslims or the Government.

There are 85 non-Muslim groups registered with the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA) at the Ministry of Culture. Approximately 200,000 Christians, mostly ethnic Russians and other Soviet-era immigrant groups, reside in the country. The largest Christian group is Russian Orthodox, but other registered organizations include Baptists (five organizations), Roman Catholics (two), Seventh-day Adventists (one), Jehovah's Witnesses (one), Lutherans (no data available) and Korean Protestants, which include the SunMin Church (two). Other religious minorities include Baha'is (four registered organizations), Zoroastrians (no data available), Hare Krishnas (one), and Jews (one). Each of these groups is very small and nearly all their members live in Dushanbe or other large cities. An estimated 0.01 percent of the population is atheist or does not belong to any religious denomination.

Christian missionaries from Western countries, Korea, India, and elsewhere are present in small numbers. The DRA previously estimated the number of Christian converts since independence at up to 3,000 persons. Groups of Islamic missionaries also visited the country during the period covered by this report.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, the Government monitored the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political or espousing "extremist tendencies," and some local administrative offices misinterpreted the term "secular state" to require a Government bias against religion.

The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Religion and Religious Organizations" was established December 1, 1994, and amended in 1997. The law provides the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and practice their religion of choice. The law also protects the right of individuals to proselytize. The law protects religious freedom, but in practice the Government, including the justice system, did not always rigorously enforce the law in a nondiscriminatory fashion.

Although there is no official state religion, the Government recognizes two Islamic holy days, Eid Al-Fitr and Idi Qurbon (Eid al-Adha), as state holidays.

According to the Law "On Religion and Religious Organizations," religious communities must be registered by the Department for Religious Affairs. In November 2006 the Government dissolved the State Committee on Religious Affairs (SCRA)

and established the Department for Religious Affairs (DRA) within the Ministry of Culture. The former head of the SCRA is now a Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Culture. The official justification for registration is to ensure that religious groups act in accordance with the law; however, some religious groups alleged that the practical purpose is to ensure that they do not become overtly political. To register with the DRA, 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 DRA in order to worship privately.

The DRA and local authorities share responsibility for the registration of neighborhood mosques and must agree on the physical location of a given mosque. The DRA is the primary authority for registration of non-Muslim groups; however, such groups must also register their place of worship with local officials. According to the DRA, local authorities may object to the registration of a place of worship only if the proposed structure does not meet sanitation or building codes, or if it is located on public land or immediately adjacent to Government buildings, schools, or other places of worship. If the local government objects to a proposal, the religious community requesting permission must suggest an alternative. In the absence of registration, local authorities can force a place of worship to close, and fine its members.

There were no cases of the DRA permanently denying registration to religious groups during the period covered by this report. There were no reports of groups declining to apply for registration out of a belief that it would not be granted; however, the DRA rejected some applications on technical grounds, stalling registration. There were isolated cases of local government refusal to register religious groups in their areas, such as in the city of Tursonzade, where the DRA demanded local registration for a branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses in addition to their national registration.

The country has 2,842 registered mosques for daily prayers. This represents a decline from 2,885 registered mosques in 2006; however, the DRA claimed that it did not officially close any mosques during the reporting period. So-called "Friday mosques" (larger facilities built for weekly Friday prayers) must be registered with the DRA. There are 262 such mosques registered, not including Ismaili places of worship. Only one such mosque is authorized per 15,000 residents in a given geographic area. Many observers contend that this is discriminatory because no such rule exists for other religious groups.

There are 19 madrassahs at the college level, and one Islamic university. The Government permits private religious schools, but they must be registered. The Government closed some madrassahs operating without a license.

The law does not prohibit parents teaching religious beliefs to their own children in the privacy of their homes, but restrictions exist that prohibit homeschooling children outside of the family.

During the period covered by this report, President Rahmon continued to strongly defend "secularism," a politicized term that carries the strong connotation of being "anti-extremist" rather than "nonreligious." In national speeches the President cautioned against outsiders unfairly linking Islam to terrorism. While the vast majority of citizens consider themselves Muslim, there is a significant fear of Islamic extremism, both in the Government and among the population at large.

A 1999 constitutional amendment permits religiously-based political parties, although a 1998 law specifying that parties may not receive support from religious institutions remained in effect. During the reporting period, two representatives from a religiously oriented party, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), were members in the lower house of the national Parliament, which has a total of 63 members. There also were 13 deputies from the IRPT in district Parliaments around the country. The IRPT is the only legal Islamic political party in Central Asia.

An executive decree generally prohibits Government publishing houses from publishing anything in Arabic script; however, some have done so in special cases if they presented the material for review prior to printing. They generally do not publish religious literature in general, but have done so on occasion, including producing copies of the Qur'an. There is no legal restriction on the distribution or possession of the Qur'an, the Bible, or other religious works; however, in practice the Government restricted distribution of Christian literature. There were no reported restrictions on the religious-oriented press. The IRPT distributes four publications and an Iranian news agency broadcasts a weekly radio program.

The new draft religion law introduced by the SCRA in January 2006 was distributed domestically for review but had not been sent to Parliament by the end of the reporting period. The law entitled "On Freedom of Conscience, on Religious Associations and Other [Religious] Organizations," would replace the current law on religion and add restrictions, such as increasing to 400 the number of petition signatures required to form a religious association; prohibiting religious education in private houses; prohibiting proselytizing; prohibiting religious associations from participating in political activities; and prohibiting political parties from having a religion-based ideology (which would effectively forbid the IRPT). On June 28 2007 representatives of 22 minority religious groups, including Baha'is, Catholics, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, Pentecostals and other Protestant denominations, signed an open letter to the President and Parliament expressing concern that the draft law would effectively outlaw minority religious groups in the country.

The Government issued a textbook to high schools in 2005 on the history of Islam, and a course on the history of religions is taught in public schools at the 10th grade level. Observers interpreted such Government-imposed instruction as a way of controlling religious indoctrination. President Rahmon also declared that the Islamic University would be funded by the state, and the curriculum would include science and math.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government bans the extremist Islamist political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir and its members are subject to arrest and imprisonment for subversion.

Although the DRA did not refuse any religious group registration during the reporting period, it declined to accept some applications, citing missing documentation or other technicalities. Some religious groups, unable to register, claimed the excuses were false and a way to deny registration. Local authorities in some cases used the registration requirement to prevent activities by some groups. The Government did not explicitly prohibit or discourage specific religious groups. Some religious leaders alleged that there was a de facto moratorium on new registrations pending adoption of the new draft religion law.

Although the DRA reported it did not close any registered mosques or prayer rooms during this reporting period and was no longer pursuing a registration campaign, the media reported that authorities closed down several unregistered prayer groups, mosques, and madrassahs.

The local government of Tursonzade continued to use administrative barriers to prevent the registration of a place of worship for the Jehovah's Witnesses, in spite of their national registration and DRA efforts on their behalf.

The DRA controlled participation in the Hajj and imposed further restrictions on pilgrims ("hajjis") during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to require air travel for the Hajj and controlled local tour operators, citing hygiene and safety concerns as reasons for limiting other means of travel. Hajjis are required to register with the DRA and deposit $2,500 (8,625 Tajik Somoni) prior to departure. In 2007, the DRA apparently lifted the previous quota limit of 3,500 citizen hajjis; as a result, 4,622 citizens participated in the Hajj in 2007, compared with 3,450 in 2006 and 4,072 in 2005, out of the overall quota of 6,000 hajjis that the Saudis allocated.

The Government continued to carry out "attestations" of imams, through which it tested all imams on their knowledge of Islamic teachings and religious principles. Imams could be dismissed if they did not pass the test. The Government organized a seminar for Imam-Khatibs of Friday mosques in Dushanbe to teach them about the various sects of Islam.

A 2004 Council of Ulamo fatwa prohibiting women from praying in mosques remained in effect. The fatwa was generally observed; however, some women did pray in small mosques without consequence. The Council of Ulamo, an ostensibly nongovernmental body that monitors and standardizes Islamic teaching, justified the fatwa by explaining that according to the country's historical tradition, women do not pray in mosques. Some considered the fatwa a political move inspired by the Government under the guise of religious law to reduce the access women have to IRPT messages and their ability to pass religious teachings to their children. Some local officials forbade members of the IRPT to speak in local mosques; however, this restriction reflected political rather than religious differences.

In early 2007 the Minister of Education declared that in accordance with a new dress code for all public educational institutions, girls would not be permitted to wear the hijab, a Muslim head covering. The new policy reinforced the Minister's 2005 statement banning the hijab, but the Government maintained that this was neither official law nor policy. In practice, during this reporting period, many female

students and teachers were expelled from school for wearing the hijab; there was no official Government reaction to the ongoing expulsions.

There were no further reports of local government officials prohibiting Muslim women from having their photographs taken for an internal identification document while wearing the hijab. The DRA claimed that this occurred rarely and that it interceded with the identification agencies in each case to make an exception.

During this reporting period, law enforcement officials continued to remove children found attending mosques during the day. This action was taken after Government officials declared that children should be studying in schools, not worshipping in mosques. Some citizens protested and in at least one incident stopped the militia from rounding up the children by blocking the police van. However, according to media reports, police were usually successful in rounding up the children.

Missionaries of registered religious groups are not restricted by law, and they continued to proselytize openly. Missionaries were not particularly welcome in some local communities, and some religious groups experienced harassment in response to their evangelical activities. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of visa restrictions for Muslim missionaries.

On July 13, 2006, Murodullo Davlatov, the former Chairman of the SCRA and now the Deputy Minister of Culture responsible for the DRA, stated publicly that the committee would scrutinize Jehovah's Witnesses actions. He said that Jehovah's Witnesses must receive permission from the committee prior to importing religious literature and provide samples of the literature to the committee. Beginning in April 2007 Government authorities prohibited the release of religious literature imported by Jehovah's Witnesses, despite the group obtaining permission and proper documentation. In a written statement presented to the Jehovah's Witnesses on June 15, 2007, the DRA stated that the literature has a negative impact on the country and recommended that authorities not release the literature.

The "ban" on printing in Arabic script was thought to be an attempt to prevent the publication of extremist literature, such as those of the extremist Islamic political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Authorities in Isfara continued to restrict private Arabic language schools (including those giving private Islamic instruction) based on past reports that one such school was hosting a suspected terrorist. Restrictions on home-based Islamic education remained in place. While these restrictions were primarily due to political concerns, they affected religious instruction.

Unconfirmed reports suggested that the Government attempted to restrict the influence of two popular Islamic scholars by stopping Muslims from outside the scholar's districts from coming to their mosques to worship, barring them from becoming members of the IRPT. and confiscating audio and video cassettes of their sermons from public shops in 2006. The Government continues to examine audio and video cassettes for extremist and antigovernment material.

The Government does not have a comprehensive strategy regarding refugees. At the end of the reporting period, a Christian refugee couple from Iran, an Iranian woman and an Afghan man, remained in Tajikistan while appealing a denial of resettlement. The country did not grant this couple full refugee status according to international standards. International organizations and local NGOs reported that harassment of refugees on religious grounds was no longer as prevalent as it once was. Instead, religious refugees face the same problems as political refugees, such as: resolutions that limit areas where refugees can settle to those outside of major cities; prohibitions on the registration of refugees who passed through a third country on their way to Tajikistan; and inability to register their status in country for periods longer than 6 months

The Dushanbe city government filed charges against the Grace Sun Min Church and ordered a court hearing. The date for the hearing has not been set. The city government alleges that a piece of property owned by the church does not meet architectural standards. In 2001, the city government took the church to court in an attempt to seize the same building, claiming it belonged to the city. The church proved its ownership of the building and retained it.

On April 2 2007, Dushanbe city government officials shut down a religious celebration of Jehovah's Witnesses that more than 1,000 people attended. The officials prohibited the group from organizing in large numbers without permission from the local government.

The land dispute over Dushanbe's only synagogue remained unresolved, and the partially-destroyed building still functioned as a synagogue. Municipal officials partially tore down the synagogue, along with several mosques and administrative buildings, in February 2006, because it was in the middle of a planned park area. The city and Jewish community leaders were unable to reach a suitable compromise to relocate the synagogue or pursue an alternative solution. The city government of-

fered land for a new synagogue but stated it could not provide compensation for the building, citing "separation of church and state."

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government reported that 61 persons were detained and convicted as HT members in 2006. HT members can receive a sentence of up to 12 years in prison. Some speculated that the Government used the HT label to arrest its opposition, including members of the intelligentsia and teachers.

During the period covered by this report, the Government temporarily detained and questioned members of various Christian denominations on several occasions. Government officials accused some Tajiks of betraying Islam after converting to Christianity. During the interrogations, Government officials verbally harassed and threatened the Christians. On two separate occasions in April and May 2007, Government officials allegedly beat a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses they brought in for questioning.

On November 4, 2006, local authorities in Kairokkum from the Ministry of Interior, the prosecutor's office, and the State Committee on National Security temporarily detained and interrogated two Jehovah's Witnesses members for discussing the Bible with local citizens. The authorities verbally abused the members and threatened to rape and kill the members if they continued to preach in Kairokkum. After 5 hours of questioning the members were released. Authorities from the State Committee on National Security officially told the Jehovah's Witnesses organization that the members were detained because they lacked identification documents and permission from local authorities to preach in Kairokkum.

On December 6, 2006, the Khujand City Court convicted IRPT member Mukhtorjon Shodiev and sentenced him to 9 months in prison for inciting violence and calling for an overthrow of the Government. Shodiev and the IRPT argued that the charges were false and politically motivated.

On July 26, 2006, the Tursonzade City Court convicted and issued a fine to a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses for conducting religious education without a permit. The Witness maintained that she was having a private Bible discussion with another adult in her home. The case rose to the Supreme Court, which upheld the city court's decision on September 13, 2006 and ordered the Witness to pay a fine of $29 (100 Tajik Somonis).

There were no further developments in the May 4, 2006, death of IRPT member Sadullo Marupov, who fell from the third story of a police station in Isfara, a town in the northern Sughd region known for its strong Islamic roots. Officials stated that Marupov committed suicide; however, IRPT members refuted the official statement and claimed that police killed Marupov, and had tortured him during an earlier detention. Officials alleged Marupov was a member of Bay'at, a group the Government has labeled extremist, although some observers have questioned whether Bay'at even exists. The Government arrested three guards in connection with the case and subsequently released them with an administrative fine.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of arrests of high-profile Muslims.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

Gradually throughout the reporting period, officials suspended 2001 prohibitions on the use of loudspeakers by mosques issued by the mayor's office in Dushanbe. The prohibitions apparently were not based on any central directive. Dushanbe city authorities permitted mosques to use loudspeakers, provided the sound was directed towards the interior of the mosque. Mosques in the Sughd and Khatlon regions openly used loudspeakers directed away from the mosque for the daily call to prayer without facing prosecution.

During the reporting period, women were increasingly permitted to be photographed for official identification while wearing the hijab, particularly to participate on the Hajj. Some women were also able to attend mosque without being detained or prosecuted.

The Government also relaxed the "ban" on printing in Arabic script by Government publishing houses. The Government permitted the printing of materials presented to the director of the publishing house, if submitted for review prior to printing, and deemed to be non-threatening.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Conflict between different religious groups was rare, in part because there are so few non-Muslims; however, some Muslim leaders occasionally expressed the opinion that minority religious groups undermined national unity and complained that 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, felt both by the Government and the general population. Some citizens, often including the Government, interpret a secular state to mean a laical state that should be void of religious practices. Some minority groups reported incidents possibly related to religious discrimination.

On August 18 and September 14, 2006, unknown assailants threw Molotov cocktails at a synagogue in Dushanbe, setting parts of the building on fire. On September 14 the Russian Orthodox Church in Dushanbe also suffered a Molotov cocktail attack. The Ministry of Interior investigated the incidents, but the Government did not prosecute anyone during the reporting period. The perpetrators' motivation was unclear.

The Rabbi of the Dushanbe synagogue reported a break-in at his home in August 2006.Unknown individuals broke into a local church on March 11, 2007. The respective religious groups suspected that the break-ins were related to the groups' religious beliefs, but the motive remained unknown. The Ministry of Interior investigated the case, but no suspects were arrested during the reporting period.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The Embassy monitored ongoing religious freedom problems and issues that could potentially become abuses of religious freedom, including matters relating to religious legislation, registration problems, court cases that might have been motivated by religious intolerance, and the destruction of the synagogue. The Embassy advocated on behalf of a faith-based nongovernmental organization when the Government ordered its international staff members to depart the country. As a result of the Embassy's strong advocacy, the Government permitted international staff to remain in country.

Embassy officers regularly met with leaders from across all religious groups, the Government, and international organizations to discuss religious freedom concerns and to underscore the U.S. Government's commitment to religious freedom. The Embassy supported programs designed to create a better understanding of how democracies address the issues of secularism and religious freedom.

In December 2006, ten religious leaders participated in a George Mason University program, funded by the U.S. Government, and designed to enhance interaction and cooperation between indigenous religious groups and educational institutions and to encourage a more tolerant society. Project activities included a series of workshops on religious diversity in the country by American experts; a study tour for local educators in the greater Washington, D.C., area; the development of a resource center on diversity and tolerance in Dushanbe; and the creation of a curriculum on the role of religion in society for implementation in Tajik higher educational institutions.

In October 2006 nine religious leaders traveled to the United States to participate in a Community Connections exchange program under the theme of "Religion in a Secular Society." The aim of this program was to introduce secularism in the American context to religious leaders and Government officials who have a supervisory role over religious affairs. Participants learned how religion and the state interact and about mechanisms that serve to protect religious rights in the United States. The program also emphasized the role that religious philanthropic organizations and other faith-based organizations play in the mainstream of American civil society.

The Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner in October 2006 to promote religious freedom and tolerance. The Ambassador and Embassy officers regularly spoke with students and held roundtables on human rights and religious freedom issues, including discussions about the Ministry of Education's policy against the hijab in public schools and universities.

The U.S. Government funded a project which provided legal and civic education to students at the Islamic National University with the aim of promoting religious tolerance.

TURKMENISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion; however, in practice the Government continued to restrict all forms of religious expression. All groups must register in order to gain legal status; unregistered religious activity is illegal and may be punished by administrative fines. While the 2003 law on religion and subsequent 2004 amendments had effectively restricted registration to only the two largest groups, Sunni Muslim and Russian Orthodox, and criminalized unregistered religious activity, presidential decrees issued in 2004 dramatically reduced the numerical thresholds for registration and abolished criminal penalties for unregistered religious activity; civil penalties remain. As a result, nine minority religious groups were able to register, and the Government allowed some other groups to meet quietly with reduced harassment.

There was no improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and there were troubling developments in the treatment of some unregistered groups. Following a sharp decrease in harassment of both registered and unregistered groups in late 2006, mistreatment of some registered and many unregistered religious minority group members, similar to that in previous reporting periods, resumed in February 2007. On December 21, 2006, President Saparmurat Niyazov died. The State Security Council appointed Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister of Health Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov Acting President; Berdimuhammedov was elected President in February, 2007. During the reporting period there were no indications the Government planned to rescind or modify previous policies regarding religious freedom. The Government threatened members of minority religious groups with fines, loss of employment and housing, and imprisonment because of their beliefs. There were also reports of raids.

There were no reports of societal abuses or violence based on religious beliefs or practice. The overwhelming majority of citizens identify themselves as Sunni Muslim; ethnic Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert to other religious groups, especially the lesser-known Protestant groups, are viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized, but society historically has been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs.

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 U.S. State Department officials raised religious freedom issues in meetings with Government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. The Embassy hosted three roundtables for registered and unregistered minority religious groups during the reporting period. Improving registration for nongovernmental groups, including religious organizations, and permitting them to meet regularly were top U.S. Government priorities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 188,457 square miles and a population of five million. Statistics regarding religious affiliation were not available. According to the Government's most recent census (1995), ethnic Turkmen constitute 77 percent of the population. Minority ethnic populations include Uzbeks (9.2 percent), Russians (6.7 percent), and Kazakhs (2 percent). Armenians, Azeris, and other ethnic groups comprise the remaining 5.1 percent. The majority religion is Sunni Muslim, and Russian Orthodox Christians constitute the largest religious minority. The level of active religious observance is unknown.

Since independence there has been a tightly controlled revival of Islam. During the Soviet era, there were only four mosques operating; now there are 398. Ethnic Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Baloch living in Mary province are predominantly Sunni Muslim. There are small pockets of Shi'a Muslims, many of whom are ethnic Iranians, Azeris, or Kurds living along the border with Iran and in Turkmenbashy (Krasnovodsk).

Restrictive Government control, indigenous Islamic culture, and 70 years of Soviet rule have meant that traditional mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in society. Local interpretations of Islam place a heavy premium on rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death ("sadakas"), featuring music and dancing that more traditional Muslims view as unorthodox. Together with shrine pilgrimage, such rituals play a greater role in local Muslims' expression of Islam than regular prayer at mosques.

While the 1995 census indicated that ethnic Russians comprised almost 7 percent of the population, subsequent emigration to Russia and elsewhere has reduced considerably this proportion. Most ethnic Russians and Armenians are Christian. Prac-

ticing Russian Christians are generally members of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). There are 13 Russian Orthodox churches, 3 of which are in Ashgabat. A priest resident in Ashgabat leads the ROC within the country, serving under the religious jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Archbishop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. There are no Russian Orthodox seminaries.

Ethnic Russians and Armenians also comprise a significant percentage of members of unregistered religious congregations; ethnic Turkmen appear to be increasingly represented among these groups as well. There are small communities of the following unregistered denominations: the Roman Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and several evangelical Christian groups including "Separate" Baptists, charismatic groups, and an unaffiliated, nondenominational group.

Small communities of Baha'is, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Society for Krishna Consciousness were registered with the Government. In May 2005 the Greater Grace Church of Turkmenistan, the International Church of Christ, the New Apostolic Church of Turkmenistan, and two groups of Pentecostal Christians were able to register.

A very small community of ethnic Germans, most of whom live in and around the city of Saragt, reportedly included practicing Lutherans. Approximately 1,000 ethnic Poles live in the country; they have been largely absorbed into the Russian community and consider themselves Russian Orthodox. The Catholic community in Ashgabat, which included both citizens and foreigners, met in the chapel of the Vatican Nunciature. There were some foreign missionaries, although the extent of their activities was unknown.

An estimated 1,000 Jews live in the country. Most are members of families who came from Ukraine during World War II. There are some Jewish families living in Turkmenabat, on the border with Uzbekistan, who are known as Bukharan Jews, referring to the Uzbek city of Bukhara. There were no synagogues or rabbis, and Jews continued to emigrate to Israel, Russia, and Germany; however, the Jewish population remained relatively constant. The community gathered for religious observances but did not opt to register as a religious group; nor were there reports of harassment.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government restricts these rights. The criminal code outlaws violations of religious freedom or persecution by private actors; in practice it is not enforced. In 2004 the Government published amendments to the 2003 law on religion that reduced numerical thresholds for registration from 500 members to 5, and made all minority groups eligible to register. The amendments established two categories of religious assemblies: religious groups (comprising at least 5 and fewer than 50 members of legal age) and religious organizations (comprising at least 50 members). The amendments leave significant gray areas in the law.

The 2003 law requires all religious organizations to register, made operation of unregistered religious organizations a criminal offense, further restricted religious education, and monitored financial and material assistance to religious groups from foreign sources. In response to international pressure, a 2004 presidential decree lifted criminal penalties. The remaining civil law continues to allow the Government to control religious life and to restrict the activities of all religious groups. The 2003 law did not codify religious activities in localities other than where a group was registered. In October 2005 the Government announced a temporary procedure for the registration of religious groups' regional branches by issuing powers of attorney. Ministry of Justice (MOJ) representatives also stated that amendments would be made to the 2003 law on religion that would codify the branch registration issue, but this did not happen during the reporting period.

Former President Niyazov signed a decree in 2004 that strengthened the 2003 law on religious practice and religious organizations and increased registration fees for religious organizations to $100 (2.5 million manat at the unofficial rate). In addition the decree relieved the MOJ of the obligation to publish in the local media a list of registered religious organizations for transparency. Without a published list, legally registered groups were more isolated and the public was less able to respond when authorities harassed registered groups. The law also gave the MOJ the right to cancel a group's registration based on vaguely defined charges.

The Government-appointed Council on Religious Affairs (CRA) reports to the president and ostensibly acts as an intermediary between the Government bureaucracy and registered religious organizations. It includes Sunni Muslim imams and the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as Government representatives,

but no representatives of minority religious groups. In practice the CRA acts as an arm of the state, exercising direct control over the hiring, promotion, and firing of both Sunni Muslim and Russian Orthodox clergy as well as helping to control all religious publications and activities. Its writ is enforced by security forces, specifically the Sixth Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and it has no role in promoting interfaith dialogue. Although the Government does not officially favor any religion, it has provided financial and other support to the CRA for the construction of new mosques. The Government also pays most Muslim clerics' salaries, approves all senior cleric appointments, and requires the latter to report regularly to the CRA.

Until June 2004 Government entities at all levels, including the courts, had interpreted the laws in such a way as to discriminate against those practicing any faith other than Sunni Islam or Russian Orthodox Christianity, whose congregations represented the only two registered religious groups. A 2004 decree reduced the minimum required number of adherents for registration, however, and in the year following the decree, nine additional religious groups registered: the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church of Turkmenistan, Seventh-day Adventist Church of Turkmenistan, Baha'i Community of Turkmenistan, Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas), Full Gospel Christian Church of Turkmenistan (Pentecostals), Light of the East Church (Dashoguz Pentecostal Church), Greater Grace Church of Turkmenistan, International Church of Christ, and the New Apostolic Church of Turkmenistan. Each of these groups comprised fewer than 50 members.

Shi'a Muslims remained unregistered, and there were no reports that they tried to register since the March 2004 decree, although they remained in contact with the CRA.

In practice Government policies, including those at the city level such as zoning regulations on the use of private residences, have created difficulties for some groups in finding places to hold worship services. According to the national residential code, no religious activity is allowed in private homes or in public halls located in residential areas. However, two registered religious groups, the Baha'i community and the Krishna Consciousness Society, were permitted to conduct worship meetings in homes.

Unregistered religious groups and unregistered branches of religious groups are forbidden to conduct religious activities, including gathering, disseminating religious materials, and proselytizing. Government authorities have disrupted meetings of unregistered religious groups. Participants in those groups are subject to fines and administrative (not criminal) arrest under the administrative code. The Government prohibits foreign missionary activity and foreign religious organizations; however, the law does not restrict the worship choices of foreigners.

The Government has incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition in its effort to redefine a national identity. For example the Government has built large, monumental mosques, such as the ones in Ashgabat, Gokdepe, and Gypjak. Despite its embrace of certain aspects of Islamic culture, the Government is concerned about foreign Islamic influence and the interpretation of Islam by local believers. The Government promotes a moderate understanding of Islam based on Turkmen religious and national traditions. In April 2007, President Berdimuhammedov visited Saudi Arabia and performed umrah (minor pilgrimage) rituals in Mecca, recalling former President Niyazov's 1992 umrah.

The CRA has urged imams to accord greater attention to President Niyazov's spiritual-social books on culture and heritage, *Ruhnama* and *Ruhnama II*, by teaching them as holy texts and placing them next to the Qur'an in some mosques. Although the country elected a new president in February 2007, this policy did not change. Phrases from the *Ruhnama* are inscribed on the large mosque in former President Niyazov's home village of Gypjak.

In 2003 the widely respected former mufti of the country, Nasrullah Ibn Ibadullah, was replaced, secretly tried, and sentenced in 2004 to 22 years in prison. Ibn Ibadullah's replacement, Kakageldi Wepayev, was subsequently placed under house arrest for "misbehavior"—allegedly including drinking and womanizing—and replaced in 2004 by then 27-year-old recent seminary graduate Rowshen Allaberdiyev.

Mosques and Muslim clergy are state-sponsored and financed. The Russian Orthodox Church and other religious groups are independently financed. The Government recognizes only Sunni Muslim holy days as national holidays. These include Gurban Bairam (Eid al-Adha), a 3-day holiday commemorating the end of the Hajj, and Oraza-Bairam (Eid al-Fitr), commemorating the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

The Government does not offer alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors; individuals who want to refuse military service for religious reasons are offered

noncombatant roles within the military. Until June 2007, conscripted members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were returned home unharmed several days after being called up, although they were not given papers excusing them from military service, which are needed for employment. This policy changed in June 2007, however, when three Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested and charged with avoiding military service.

There is no official religious instruction in public schools; however, the Government requires all public schools and institutes of higher learning to hold regular instruction on the *Ruhnama*. The Ministry of Education requires that each child bring a personal copy of the *Ruhnama* to school. President Berdimuhammedov raised the issue of education reform in January 2007 but there was no change in the *Ruhnama* policy by the end of the reporting period.

Article Six of the November 2004 law allows mosques to provide religious education to children after school for 4 hours a week with the approval of parents. Persons who graduate from institutions of higher religious education (the law does not specify domestic or international institutions) and who obtain CRA approval may provide religious education. Citizens have the right to receive religious education individually or with other persons; however, the law prohibits providing religious education in private, and those who do so are subject to punitive legal action. Although some independent religious education exists, the Government has done nothing to promote religious education beyond the official version incorporating the *Ruhnama*. Some Sunni mosques have regularly scheduled classes on the Qur'an.

The 2003 law prohibits the ROC from conducting religious education programs without CRA and presidential approval, and there were no reports that either the CRA or the President approved such programs. Homeschooling 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government officially has banned only extremist groups advocating violence, but it also categorized Islamic groups advocating stricter interpretation of Islamic religious doctrine as "extremist." The activities of unregistered religious groups remained illegal, with violators subject to fines and administrative arrest under the administrative code.

During the reporting period, at least four religious groups, all of which sought several times to register, continued to be denied legal status; as in previous years, the Government delayed or denied applications, citing technical reasons, including the requirement that the head of the group have "higher education. The Roman Catholic Church remained unregistered because of a conflict with local law requiring that the head of the Church be a citizen of the country.

Other groups either remained fearful of registering, citing the amount and type of information the Government required, or refused on principle to do so.

Registered religious minority groups reported few instances of harassment. However, in two cases regional affiliates of registered groups experienced harassment by provincial and district law enforcement agencies. Some of these groups found that by routinely notifying the Government of their gatherings and events and inviting Government representatives to attend, they experienced decreased Government harassment.

The Government restricted unregistered religious groups from establishing places of worship, and violations constituted an administrative offense. Registered groups also experienced difficulties establishing and maintaining places of worship; several groups stated that their largest obstacle was a lack of funds to rent a public hall. Several groups said they would prefer to buy a worship center or land to establish a permanent one, but municipal authorities raised insurmountable bureaucratic hurdles. Five registered minority religious groups have established public places of worship; three were rented and two were private residential homes of group members. The Government did not restrict some worship services in private homes, and the CRA assisted several registered minority groups to locate suitable worship locations. The Government forbids unregistered religious groups or unregistered branches of registered religious groups from gathering publicly or privately and can punish individuals or groups who violate these prohibitions. Some unregistered congregations continued to practice quietly, largely in private homes.

The Government also controls access to Islamic education. The theology faculty at Turkmen State University in Ashgabat had been the only academic faculty to conduct Islamic education. In July 2005 the President dissolved the theology faculty and incorporated the theology students and curriculum into the university's history department, leaving no official Islamic academic faculty.

The Government does not officially restrict persons from changing their religious beliefs and affiliation, but ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups accused of proselytizing and disseminating religious material generally receive harsher treatment than nonethnic Turkmen. During this reporting period, there was one report of local government officials attempting to force an ethnic Turkmen Christian convert to renounce his faith.

There were three high-level officials in the Government with a Russian Jewish heritage, and at least one deputy minister who is Russian Orthodox. No representatives of other minority religious groups were known to be working at senior or mid-level government positions during the reporting period. Some minority religious group adherents remained members of the only political party but feared openly acknowledging their faith out of concern for political reprisal.

The Government monitored minority religious groups, particularly those perceived to have connections with or support from a supranational hierarchy. The law prohibits foreign missionary activity, although in practice both Christians and Muslims working in the country in other capacities engaged in religious outreach. The 2003 law on religion stipulated that religious groups must report any financial or material assistance received from foreign sources. The Government denies visas to foreigners suspected of conducting or intending to conduct missionary activity.

By decree, publishing religious literature was prohibited, limiting the availability of Qur'ans, Bibles and other religious literature. Sacred religious books were rarely available for purchase. In practice the CRA must approve imported religious literature. Since all members of the CRA are either Government officials, Sunni Muslims or members of the ROC, minority religious groups were disadvantaged regarding importing of religious materials. When the CRA approves the importation of a publication, the number of imported copies cannot exceed the number of registered group members. The Dashoguz office of the CRA required that its officers stamp religious literature, including Bibles and Qur'ans, in order to authorize it. During the reporting period, a leader of an unregistered church in Dashoguz reported that officials confiscated religious literature from him on a train and intercepted religious literature that had been mailed to him.

The Government enforced the use of former President Niyazov's books, *Ruhnama* and *Ruhnama II*, in educational institutions, Government offices, and mosques. Copies of the book were kept in most mosques, and authorities have pressured religious leaders to place it alongside the Qur'an and to preach Ruhnama in their services.

In 2004 the Government formally lifted the exit visa requirement, theoretically permitting travel by all those who wished to participate in the Hajj or other travel for religious purposes; however, the Government maintained a "black list" of individuals and continued to limit freedom of movement, including in cases where individuals wanted to travel outside the country in order to conduct religious study. The Government continued to limit participation in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj), specifying that only 188 pilgrims (one plane load) personally approved by the President, out of the country's quota of 4,600, would be allowed to travel to Mecca. The national airline provided transportation free of charge.

According to Forum 18, the Government on January 6, 2007 refused to grant permission to Merdan Shirmedov, a Protestant from an ethnic Turkmen fellowship in Dashoguz, to leave the country to join his pregnant wife, Wendy Lucas in the United States. Lucas said that on April 10, 2007, Shirmedov tried to cross the border to Uzbekistan, but was prevented from leaving after Turkmenistan border guards found his name on a computerized exit blacklist. Officials refused to tell him why he was barred from leaving.

Foreign members of registered and unregistered religious groups continued to be denied entry visas.

Several registered religious minority groups reported that the Government monitored them by attending their gatherings; nonetheless, communities continued to engage in regular activities. Officers from the Sixth Department in Ashgabat, the division charged with fighting organized crime and terrorism, were still charged with monitoring members of religious minorities.

The Government continued to discriminate against members of religious groups with respect to employment.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Following a sharp decrease in harassment of both registered and unregistered groups in late 2006, mistreatment of some registered and many unregistered religious minority group members resumed following the inauguration of President Berdimuhammedov in February 2007. The Government threatened members of minority religious groups with fines, loss of employment and housing, and imprisonment because of their beliefs. There were also reports of raids.

According to Forum 18, Ministry of National Security (MNB) officials arrested Vyacheslav Kalataevsky, a Baptist leader from Turkmenbashy, on March 12, 2007, and on May 14 he was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment in a labor camp on criminal charges of illegally crossing the border in 2001. In 2001, authorities had deported Kalataevsky without documents to Kazakhstan, and after a week he crossed back into the country to rejoin his wife and children.

Forum 18 also reported the arrest on May 19 of the leader of a Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Turkmenbashy City, Yevgeny Potolov. The report speculated that Potolov, a Russian citizen, had also been arrested for entering the country illegally. In 2001 authorities had deported Potolov to Kazakhstan, but he had returned to Turkmenistan to rejoin his wife and children.

During incidents involving police detaining and questioning members of unregistered minority religious groups, authorities took a range of actions including: filming those present; recording the names, addresses, and places of work of the congregants; threatening fines and imprisonment; and confiscating religious literature. With the exception of the Kalataevsky and Potolov cases, there were fewer reports of prolonged detention or physical abuse.

The fate of an estimated 30 suspected "Wahhabis" reportedly detained in Ashgabat in August 2005 remains unknown.

The country's former mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, remained in prison serving a 22-year sentence. Ibadullah had been dismissed as mufti in 2003, reportedly in part for his refusal to teach the *Ruhnama* as a sacred text and in March 2004 was secretly tried and convicted, reportedly for his alleged role in a failed 2002 assassination attempt on Niyazov. Little was known about the whereabouts or the condition of Ibadullah, despite calls from the international community for access to him and for his release. Amnesty International reported in early 2007 that his family was increasingly concerned for his safety.

On April 29, 2007, an unidentified official—possibly from the Sixth Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs—demanded and then fled with the travel documents of three members of an unregistered Mary-based group who were traveling by train to Dashoguz province to meet with a religious leader. A transportation official, finding the three group members without documents, returned them by train to Ashgabat the same day.

On April 19, 2007, officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Sixth Department raided a branch of the registered Evangelical Baptist Church of Turkmenistan in Turkmenbashy. The authorities came to a worship service, and took Bibles and hymnals from the congregation. That evening, police summoned two women to a local official's office and fined them approximately $90 (2.5 million manat), threatening further harassment if the women did not pay. The police gave no specific reason for the harassment, but suggested that the women ought to be attending a Russian Orthodox Church.

In early 2007 law enforcement officials reportedly raided a meeting of the registered group Svet Vostoka (Light of the East) Pentecostal church in Dashoguz.

On March 18, 2007, authorities raided a meeting of an unregistered religious group in Abadan and fined home owners.

On February 4, 2007, a group of law enforcement officers, who refused to show identification or a search warrant, raided the private house of the leader of an unregistered Christian group, where a wide circle of relatives and family friends were gathered. The inhabitants of the house were not conducting any religious activities. For 5 hours, the group of officers videotaped the people and belongings inside the house.

In June 2007, three Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested and charged with avoiding military service. Their trials were expected to take place in July 2007.

Jehovah's Witnesses also reported numerous cases of harassment, detention, and abuse. The group, which had not sought to register, reported in April 2007 that tensions with the Government were high, and cited seven specific cases of harassment that occurred in March and April, including two in which members lost their jobs.

According to their report, on April 17, 2007, Dashoguz police took a Bible and religious literature from the room of Jehovah's Witness member Rinat Babajanov and took him to the city hall, where he was fined $55 (1,250,000 manat). On April 13, 2007, three officers forcibly took ethnic Turkmen member Muhammed Annayev from his home in Ashgabat and questioned him about his religious beliefs, asking why he did not adhere to the Muslim faith.

On April 11, 2007, in Turkmenabat, two police officers entered an apartment shared by three Jehovah's Witnesses, searched the apartment in the residents' absence, and took their passports. All three Jehovah's Witnesses were detained for several hours and one, a woman, was sexually molested by the police officers. Upon appeal, the prosecutor initially declared the passport seizure illegal, but then threat-

ened to fine the Jehovah's Witnesses after talking to the police. On April 9, 2007, Jehovah's Witness Anna Karayeva was called to the Ashgabat city hall, where five people questioned her for 2 hours about her religious beliefs, and fined her $55 (1,250,000 manat), which she refused to pay. Following this incident, Karayeva lost her job, reportedly on the orders of the MNB.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on April 2, 2007, police officers in Ashgabat interrupted their holiday celebration. They took several members to the police station and demanded that they write an explanation in front of police, representatives of the local mayor's office, and representatives of the CRA and MNB. Also on April 2, 2007 in Turkmenabat eight police officers and eight officials in civilian clothing raided the apartment of Jehovah's Witness Maral Jorayeva during a holiday celebration involving nine adults and six children. The officials took Bibles, religious literature, and passports from Jorayeva and threatened her.

On March 17, 2007, two police officers entered the Ashgabat home of Jehovah's Witnesses Mahrigozel Saparova and Vitali Hojayev without a proper warrant. A regional court fined the couple approximately $55 (1,250,000 manat) for violating several articles of Turkmenistan's law, and Saparova—a doctor—lost her job shortly afterwards.

On October 28, 2006, Ashgabat police detained two Jehovah's Witnesses, Andrey Pomerantsev and his spouse, Orungul Umirova, for proselytizing. They were held at a temporary detention facility in Ashgabat for 2 days during an extended national holiday without any proceedings, but were released unharmed after the case was brought to the notice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported several similar cases of harassment, in which Jehovah's Witnesses were detained, searched, fined and occasionally beaten, during previous reporting periods as well.

A Hare Krishna representative reported that harassment from officials had decreased since her group's registration; there were no reports of authorities beating Hare Krishnas during this reporting period. In October 2006, as part of a general annual prison amnesty, former President Niyazov released imprisoned Hare Krishna follower Ceper Annaniyazova, who had been sentenced to 7 years in prison in November 2005 for having illegally crossed the border in 2002.

The Government did not destroy any mosques during the reporting period and, in fact, resumed renovation of a mosque in Mary City and on a mosque in the new president's home village. One mosque in Turkmenbashy was destroyed in 2006. In 2004 at least six mosques were destroyed, some for no stated reason, others ostensibly for Ashgabat city "beautification" plans. In 2004 a Sunni cemetery north of the capital was leveled. Another cemetery in Ashgabat was being encroached upon by a high-rise development. In 2004 Muslims in Bagyr, a predominantly Kurdish suburb of Ashgabat, reported they could no longer bury their family members in traditional cemeteries but instead were obliged to use a centralized location. The Government restricts the number of mosques by requiring permission for construction. Government policy is that every community should have one mosque; however, in 2004 President Niyazov ordered that no more mosques were to be built without CRA approval and stated mosques would henceforth be led by state-appointed imams.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

Registered minority religious groups generally continued to report lower levels of harassment.

In a May 2007 meeting with Embassy officers, the Deputy Chairman of the CRA agreed in principle to hold another minority religious group roundtable to discuss pressing concerns, similar to the one held on October 20, 2005.

The CRA intervened on one occasion during the reporting period to release religious literature that had been embargoed by the Customs Department.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of general societal abuses based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report.

Many Muslims do not regularly attend mosques; however, the overwhelming majority of the population identify themselves as "Muslim," and national identity is linked to Islam. (Turkmen society considers an individual to be born into an ethnoreligious group.) Departures from the pattern are rare and either receive little sup-

port or are criticized. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert from Islam to other religious groups are viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized.

Despite strong ties between Islam and national identity, the society historically has been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs. For example, in the early part of the 20th century Ashgabat was a refuge for Baha'is escaping persecution in Iran, and a Baha'i temple was built in the city at that time. Government repression of minority religious groups does not reflect doctrinal or societal friction between the Muslim majority and minority religious groups. Rather, it reportedly reflects the Government's concern that the proliferation of nontraditional religious groups could undermine state control, promote civil unrest, facilitate undue influence by foreign interests, and destabilize the Government. There is also a societal distrust of foreign-based religious groups and the belief that Islam from outside the country is "Wahhabist"—extremist.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and raises specific cases of detention or harassment with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and CRA.

During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy representatives and visiting U.S. Government officials raised cases of religious freedom abuse in meetings with Government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. Embassy officers met with officials from the CRA in May 2007 and urged the CRA to host regular roundtable meetings with minority religious groups, similar to the roundtable held in October 2005.

The Embassy hosted three roundtables for representatives of religious minority groups during the reporting period. On May 1, the Government sent the Embassy a diplomatic note protesting the last of these roundtables and requesting the Embassy to "coordinate with the Turkmen side in the established manner when it plans events related to the religious sphere."

Embassy officers met regularly with the staff of the OSCE center in Ashgabat, the U.K. Embassy, and other diplomatic missions in order to maximize cooperation in monitoring abuses of and promoting greater respect for religious freedom.

Embassy officers regularly met with representatives of registered and unregistered religious groups to monitor their status, receive reports of abuse, and discuss measures to raise their cases with the Government. These representatives have been much more willing to meet with Embassy officials due to the reduced registration requirements and elimination of criminal penalties for religious activities.

UZBEKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, the Government continued to restrict these rights in practice. The Government permits the operation of what it considers mainstream religious groups, including approved Muslim groups, Jewish groups, the Russian Orthodox Church, and various other Christian denominations, such as Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Baptists. Uzbek society generally tolerates Christian churches 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.

The status of religious freedom remained restricted with a specific decline for some Pentecostal and other Christian groups during the period of this report. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of some Christian denominations, continued to operate without registration because they had not satisfied the strict registration requirements set out by the law. As in previous periods, Protestant groups with ethnic Uzbek members reported operating in a climate of harassment and fear. Using new criminal statutes enacted in 2006, the Government brought criminal charges against two pastors. One was sentenced to 4 years in a labor camp; the other received a suspended sentence and probation. Law enforcement officials raided and harassed some unregistered groups, detaining and fining their leaders and members. The Government continued its campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups suspected of extremist sentiments or activities, arresting numerous alleged members of these groups and sentencing them to lengthy jail terms. Many of these were suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a banned extremist Islamic political movement, the banned Islamic group Akromiya (Akromiylar), or unspecified "Wahhabi" groups. The Government generally did not

interfere with worshippers attending sanctioned mosques and granted approvals for new Islamic print, audio, and video materials. A small number of "underground" mosques operated under the close scrutiny of religious authorities and the security services.

Religious groups enjoyed generally tolerant relations; however, neighbors, family, and employers often continued to pressure ethnic Uzbek Christians, especially recent converts and residents of smaller communities. There were several reports of sermons against missionaries and persons who converted from Islam. A Pentecostal deacon was severely beaten after his church was prominently featured in a documentary on state television directed against Christian evangelicals. Unlike in previous periods, there was only one report of individuals being charged with the distribution of HT leaflets, which often contain strong anti-Semitic rhetoric, during the period of this report.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy is actively engaged in monitoring religious freedom and maintains contact with Government and religious leaders and human rights activists. The Embassy sponsored exchange and educational programs designed to promote religious tolerance and to expand religious freedom. On November 14, 2006, the Secretary of State designated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 172,742 square miles and an estimated population of 27.8 million. International experts believe the population has sustained a loss of 2–3 million in recent years due to the growing trend of labor migration from Uzbekistan to neighboring countries, Russia, South Korea, and the Middle East. Approximately 80 percent of the population is ethnic Uzbek; 5.5 percent Russian; 5 percent Tajik; 3 percent Kazakh; 2.5 percent Karakalpak; and 1.5 percent Tatar. There are no official statistics on membership in various religious groups; however, it is estimated that up to 90 percent of the population is nominally Sunni Muslim, of the Hanafi school. Shi'a Muslims, who are concentrated in the provinces of Bukhara and Samarkand, constitute an estimated 1 percent of the population. Approximately 5 percent of the population is Russian Orthodox, a percentage that declines as the number of ethnic Russians and other Slavs continue to emigrate. A growing number of Muslims and Russian Orthodox adherents actively practice their religion. Outside of Tashkent, practicing Muslims are now in the majority. During the period covered by this report, mosque attendance noticeably increased, particularly among younger men, who tend to constitute the majority of worshipers. The remaining 3 percent of the population includes small communities of Roman Catholics, Korean Christians, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Hare Krishnas, as well as atheists. In addition, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Ashkenazi and Bukharan Jews remain in the country, concentrated in the cities of Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. At least 80,000 others have emigrated to Israel and the United States over the past two decades.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government and laws restricted these rights in practice. The Constitution also establishes the principle of separation of church and state. The Government prohibits religious groups from forming political parties and social movements.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (1998 Religion Law) provides for freedom of worship, freedom from religious persecution, separation of church and state, and the right to establish schools and train clergy; however, the law grants those rights only to registered groups. It also 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. The Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), an agency accountable to the Cabinet of Ministers, must approve all religious literature.

The 1998 Religion Law 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 branch of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). This provision

enables the Government to ban any group by finding technical grounds for denying its registration petition. The CRA oversees registered religious activity. New mosques continued to face difficulties gaining registration, as did those closed previously that reapplied.

The law prohibits religious groups from training religious personnel if they do not have a registered central administrative body. Registration of a central body requires registered religious groups in 8 of the country's 13 provinces, an impossible requirement for most religious groups. There are six such entities that may legally train religious personnel. The law limits religious instruction to officially sanctioned religious schools and state-approved instructors. The law permits no private instruction and provides for fines for violations. The law prohibits the teaching of religious subjects in public schools.

Article 14 of the Religion Law prohibits the wearing of "cult robes" (religious clothing) in public places by all except "those serving in religious organizations."

The Criminal and Civil Codes contain stiff penalties for violating the Religion Law and other statutes on religious activities. In addition to the prohibited activities that include organizing an illegal religious group, the law also proscribes persuading others to join such a group and drawing minors into a religious organization without the permission of their parents. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal.

The Criminal Code formally distinguishes between "illegal" groups, which are those that are not registered properly, and "prohibited" groups, such as the extremist Islamist political party Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), Tabligh Jamoat, and other groups branded with the general term "Wahhabi" that are banned altogether. The code makes it a criminal offense, punishable by up to 5 years in prison, to organize an illegal religious group or to resume the activities of such a group after it has been denied registration or ordered to disband. In addition, the code punishes participation in such a group with up to 3 years in prison. The code also provides penalties of up to 20 years in prison (if the crime results in "grave consequences") for "organizing or participating" in the activities of religious extremist, fundamentalist, separatist, or other prohibited groups. In the past, courts often ignored the distinction between illegal and prohibited groups, and frequently convicted members of unapproved Muslim groups under both statutes. There were no reports of such practices during the reporting period.

The main laws under which authorities charge citizens for religious activity are article 159 (anti constitutional activity); article 216 (illegal establishment of public associations or religious organizations); article 216, section 2 (violation of legislation on religious organizations, including proselytism); article 244, section 1 (production and distribution of materials that create a threat to public security and public order); and article 244, section 2 (establishment, direction of, or participation in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist, or other banned organizations) of the Criminal Code. Citizens charged under these sections (particularly article 244, Section 2) are frequently charged with being members of HT.

December 2005 amendments to both the Criminal Code (article 217 Part 2) and Administrative Code (article 201) increased fines for repeated offenses of violations of the law on religious activity, raising them to 200 to 300 times the minimum monthly wage of $10 (12,420 soum) under the Criminal Code and 50 to 100 times the minimum wage under the Administrative Code.

June 2006 amendments to the Administrative Code punish "illegal production, storage, import or distribution of materials of religious content" with a fine of 20 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for individuals, or 50 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for officials of organizations, together with confiscation of the materials and the "corresponding means of producing and distributing them." Criminal Code article 244–3 addresses the same offense, punishing those already convicted under the corresponding article of the Administrative Code with a fine of 100 to 200 times the minimum monthly wage, or corrective labor of up to 3 years. Other changes introduced simultaneously to the Criminal and Administrative Codes punish the production and distribution of "literature promoting racial and religious hatred."

Although the law treats all registered religious denominations equally, the Government funds an Islamic university and the preservation of Islamic historic sites. In 2007, to mark Tashkent's designation as one of four Capitals of Islamic Culture by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the Government funded a major expansion of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (Muftiate) offices and a large new mosque and library in the complex. The Government provided logistical support for 5,000 selected Muslims to participate in the Hajj, an increase from 4,200 the previous year, but the pilgrims paid their own expenses. The Government controls the Muftiate, which in turn controls the Islamic hierarchy, the

content of imams' sermons, and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials. The Kurbon Hayit and Roza Hayit Islamic holy days are observed as national holidays.

The Government still did not implement any of the recommendations of a 2003 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) expert panel that reviewed the 1998 Religion Law and associated statutes and concluded that they were in violation of the international norms for religious freedom. The OSCE recommended lifting the bans on proselytizing and private religious instruction and decriminalizing activities of unregistered religious organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were significant governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government, by continuing to deny registration to some religious groups and by deregistering others, deprived them of their legal right to worship. The Government restricted many religious practices and activities, punishing some citizens because they engaged in religious practices in violation of the registration laws.

While somewhat supportive of moderate Muslims, the Government, citing national security concerns, bans Islamic organizations it deems extremist and criminalizes membership in them. Chief among the banned organizations are Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Akromiya, Tabligh Jamoat, and various groups the Government broadly labeled Wahhabi. The Government states that it does not consider repression of persons or groups suspected of extremism to be a matter of religious freedom, but rather of preventing armed resistance to the Government.

HT is an extremist Islamist political organization that promotes hate and praises acts of terrorism, while maintaining that it is committed to nonviolence. The party's virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western literature and Web sites call for the overthrow of secular governments, including those in Central Asia, to be replaced with a worldwide Islamic Government referred to as the Caliphate. Because HT is primarily a political organization, albeit one motivated by religious ideology, and because it does not condemn terrorist acts by other groups, authorities' actions to restrict HT and prosecute its members are not a restriction on religious freedom per se. Nor are restrictions on the IMU, a group of Namangan origin on the U.S. list of international terrorist organizations and believed to be responsible for a series of fatal bombings in the country in 1999 and 2004. Religious freedom concerns arise when innocent persons are accused of membership in these groups based solely on their religious beliefs or practice and convicted without due process.

The Government has repressed and prosecuted members of Akromiya (Akromiylar) since 1997. Religious experts claim that Akromiya is an informal association that promotes business along Islamic religious principles, while the Government claims that the group is a branch of HT and that it attempted, together with the IMU, to overthrow the Government through armed rebellion in Andijon in May 2005.

Tabligh Jamoat is an Islamic missionary group with origins in South Asia whose worship, dress, and grooming practices are based on practices from the time of Muhammad; its members claim to be exclusively religious and apolitical.

Other banned groups include alleged "Wahhabists," a term used loosely in the country for any conservative Muslims. In particular the Government uses "Wahhabist" to describe Muslims who worship outside state-approved institutions, who were educated at madrassahs abroad, or those followers of either Imam Abduvali Mirzaev of Andijon, who disappeared in 1995, or Imam Abidkhan Nazarov of Tashkent, who fled to Kazakhstan in 1998 to avoid arrest and was granted refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on March 15, 2006.

In previous reporting periods, sources claimed that authorities required imams of registered mosques to submit lists of individuals in their congregations who may have extremist tendencies. There were no such reports in this reporting period, but there were reports that the Government instructed some mahalla (neighborhood) committees and imams to identify local residents who could potentially become involved in extremist activity or groups, including those who prayed daily or otherwise demonstrated active devotion. The Government controls the content of imams' sermons and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials.

The Government's harsh treatment of suspected religious extremists has discouraged many religious believers from showing outward expressions of religious piety. Following the May 2005 violence in Andijon, authorities arrested many Andijon-area residents on charges of religious extremism. In this reporting period, there were also

credible accounts of mahalla committee chairmen actively discouraging residents from worshipping in mosques. Forum 18 News Service also reported in November 2006 that authorities distributed instructions to imams about the undesirability of children attending mosques and that police on occasion prevented children from attending Friday prayers.

Many sources reported that the atmosphere in the Muslim community has since improved, however, with many mosques overflowing into the streets for lack of space during Friday prayer. The Government has loosened its grip on observant Muslims, allowing individuals to practice their faith within a controlled environment. Nevertheless, there were accounts of law enforcement and national security officers actively monitoring and reporting on mosque activities and those of worshippers. There were also reports that local officials in Tashkent conducted a series of meetings with mahalla leaders to discourage Islamist tendencies. At these meetings officials allegedly called on families to discourage their sons from attending mosque and their daughters from wearing the hijab and also instructed neighborhood leaders to discourage the performance of traditional Islamic wedding ceremonies. The Government limited the number of Hajj pilgrims to 5,000, or approximately 20 percent of the country's total possible number of pilgrims (estimated at approximately 25,000 pilgrims or 1,000 pilgrims for every 1 million of population). Potential pilgrims were reportedly approved by local Mahalla committees, district administrations, the National Security Service, and the state-run Hajj Commission.

Many in the Government expressed suspicion of the Jehovah's Witnesses, viewing it as an extremist group. Internal police training documents continue to list the Jehovah's Witnesses, along with the IMU and HT, as security threats. Local officials and representatives of the religious establishment continued to express apprehension about the group's missionary activities. On November 30 and December 1, 2006, state television broadcasted a documentary entitled "Hypocrisy" that linked Jehovah's Witnesses with the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo.

Some mosques continued to have difficulty registering. Forum 18 reported in 2003 that the Panjera Mosque in Namangan, where approximately 500 persons used to meet for prayer on feast days, was closed by authorities in 1998 and tried unsuccessfully for several years to register. Several mosques in the southern and eastern Ferghana Valley, which had reported similar registration problems in past years, remained unregistered despite having the required number of congregants to register. Worshipers of the locally funded Tuman Mosque in Akhunbabayev District of Ferghana continued to function after court-enforced registration in early 2004. A small number of unofficial, independent mosques are allowed to operate quietly under the watch of official imams.

The Jehovah's Witnesses applied for registration at local, regional, and national levels and either received a denial or no official answer during the period covered by this report. Other churches remained unregistered after unsuccessful efforts in past years to register. These included Bethany Baptist Church in the Mirzo-Ulugbek District of Tashkent, the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik, Greater Grace Christian Church in Samarkand, and Emmanuel Church of Nukus, Karakalpakstan. Despite a number of international appeals and formal legal appeals in past reporting periods, the Mir (Peace) Church of Nukus, the Hushkhabar Church in Guliston, the Pentecostal Church in Andijon, and the Baptist Church in Gazalkent also remained unregistered.

Approximately 20 Protestant churches previously operated in Karakalpakstan; however, it was unknown how many of these were still active. No Baptist church has successfully registered since 1999. Out of the 11 Jehovah's Witnesses groups in the country, only 1, in Chirchik, was registered at the end of the reporting period. On August 24, 2006, the Government canceled the registration status of the Jehovah's Witnesses' Ferghana congregation, citing several violations of the Religion Law, including proselytizing, inciting religious enmity, and holding meetings in a private home. The Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the decision, but remained unregistered at the end of the reporting period.

As of May 1, 2007, the Government had registered 2,227 religious congregations and organizations—an increase of 3 from 2,224 recorded in July 2006. Mosques, Muslim educational institutions, and Islamic centers comprised 2,046 of the total registered, an increase of 4. Among the Muslim groups were several Shi'a congregations. The number of registered Christian groups decreased by 1. The 181 registered minority religious groups included 58 Korean Christian, 36 Russian Orthodox, 23 Baptist, 21 Pentecostal ("Full Gospel"), 10 Seventh-day Adventist, 8 Jewish, 5 Roman Catholic, 6 Baha'i, 3 Lutheran, 4 "New Apostolic," 2 Armenian Apostolic, 1 Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 Krishna Consciousness group, 1 Temple of Buddha, and 1 Christian "Voice of God" Church.

During the reporting period, some churches, particularly evangelical churches with ethnic Uzbek members, did not apply for registration because they did not expect local officials to register them. Other groups, including those with too few members, reported that they preferred not to bring themselves to the attention of authorities by submitting a registration application that obviously would not meet legal requirements. Some groups also did not want to give the authorities a list of their members, especially ethnic Uzbeks, as they were harassed during previous attempts to register. A few groups refused on principle to seek registration because they challenge the Government's right to require registration.

To register, groups also must report in their charter a valid legal address. In this reporting period, local officials denied approval of legal addresses or did not answer such requests, thus preventing religious groups from registering. The MOJ also cited this requirement in explaining local officials' decisions. On May 11, 2007, the Sergely district administration in Tashkent denied approval of a legal address for Tashkent's Jehovah's Witnesses congregation. Over the course of this reporting period, Jehovah's Witnesses in Samarkand, Kagan (Bukhara Province), Jizzak and Angren also requested approval of legal addresses but received no response. On August 24, 2006, the Ferghana provincial Justice Department deregistered the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation partly for failing to register a change in their legal address. The Ferghana congregation explained to the authorities that they had purchased a new house and were in the process of registering the new address when their registration was revoked. Members of the congregation were also accused of proselytizing. On June 12, 2007, the Ferghana congregation again requested approval of a legal address, but their request was denied. Some groups, such as the Tashkent International Church, were reluctant to purchase property without assurance that their registration would be approved. Others claimed that local officials arbitrarily withhold approval of the addresses because they oppose the existence of Christian churches with ethnic Uzbek members.

Other problems preventing registration in the past included claims of falsified congregation lists; problems certifying addresses; improper certification by fire inspectors, sanitation workers, and epidemiologists; grammatical errors in the Uzbek text of a group's charter; and other technicalities.

The International Church of Tashkent, a Protestant nondenominational church that ministers exclusively to Tashkent's international community, cannot qualify for registration, as it does not meet the legal requirement of 100 citizen members. It holds services regularly, without obstruction, in an officially registered Baptist church.

Local authorities continued to pressure Baptist churches associated with the International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians/Baptists, a denomination that rejects registration on principle, with demands to register their congregations.

Due to the Government's policy against proselytizing, ethnic Russians, Jews, and non-Muslim foreigners enjoy greater religious freedom to choose and change their religion than Muslim ethnic groups, particularly ethnic Uzbeks. Most Christian churches can operate freely 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 due to fear of restrictive reprisals, such as observing to see if they are meeting without benefit of registration, which would lead to arrest under criminal charges. Christian congregations of mixed ethnic background often face difficulties, including rejection of registration or delays in response, or are reluctant to list their ethnic Uzbek members on registration lists for fear of incurring harassment by local officials.

The private teaching of religious principles and the teaching of religion to minors without parental consent is illegal. Only religious groups with a registered central office may legally provide religious instruction.

There are 11 madrassahs (including 2 for women), which provide secondary education including a full range of secular subjects. In addition, the Islamic Institute and Islamic University in Tashkent provide higher educational instruction. The Cabinet of Ministers considers diplomas granted by madrassahs equivalent to other diplomas, thus enabling graduates of those institutions to continue their education at the university level. The curriculum in the madrassahs and Islamic Institute is oriented towards those planning to become imams or religious teachers. This is not the case with the Government-funded and established Islamic University, where students pursue religious studies from a secular perspective. While study at the Islamic University does not qualify graduates to practice as imams, some graduates of the university have been appointed imams after pursuing a standard sequence of study at a madrassah.

Apart from full-time study in these institutions, there is no officially sanctioned religious instruction for individuals interested in learning about Islam. An increasing number of imams informally offer religious education; although this is technically illegal, local authorities rarely took legal action. Two madrassahs in the populous and observantly Muslim Ferghana Valley remained closed after the Government converted them to medical facilities.

The Government restricts Shi'a Islamic education by not permitting the separate training of Shi'a imams inside the country and not recognizing such education received outside the country. However, Shi'a imams are educated in Sunni madrassahs, which offer some courses in Shi'a jurisprudence. 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 religious groups offer religious education through their religious centers. The Jewish community has no rabbinate because it does not have synagogues in eight different provinces and therefore cannot meet the requirements for a registered central office; however, the Jewish school in Tashkent's Yakkasaroy District provides instruction on Jewish culture.

The MOJ controls accreditation, a necessity for anyone attempting to work for a non-governmental organization (NGO) in the country, and has the ability to force out, without bringing formal charges, those it believes are proselytizing. The 1998 Religion Law forbids missionary work of any kind.

Several international faith-based organizations were forced to close in 2006 and 2007 as part of a wave of closures of international NGOs. On September 6, 2006, the Tashkent City Court liquidated the Uzbek branch of the U.S.-based NGO Partnership in Academics and Development (PAD) after accusing its expatriate staff of proselytizing. On August 23, 2006, the Tashkent City Court ordered the closure of the local branch of the U.S.-based charity Crosslink Development International after the Ministry of Justice accused its employees of conducting missionary activities among Muslims and Orthodox believers. The American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee faced administrative difficulties in registering local partner organizations because of their connection with a faith-based entity. A 2003 decree of the Cabinet of Ministers outlining a change in registration requirements for NGOs restricted the activities of faith-based entities.

In June 2006 the Government forced the closure of the international NGOs Central Asia Free Exchange (CAFE) and Global Involvement Through Education, after employees of the organizations were accused of engaging in proselytism, and authorities accused both organizations of several other violations of law. Both organizations maintained that their activities were strictly of a humanitarian nature.

Government employees generally display less religious devotion than do citizens in the private sector. The state maintains a policy of secularism, and Government employees are under greater scrutiny than others to maintain the separation between religion and state structures.

Unlike previous years, there were no credible reports of heads of mahalla committees threatening Christian converts that they would not be given a cemetery burial if they did not stop attending church.

State-controlled media in some cases encouraged societal prejudice against evangelical Christians. On November 30 and December 1, 2006, state television broadcast a documentary entitled "Hypocrisy" that warned citizens against associating with evangelical Christians, particularly Pentecostals. The television program was followed by a series of articles in the state-controlled press and Internet sites reinforcing this message.

Although the Government requires that the CRA approve all religious literature, in practice a number of other Government entities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), National Security Service (NSS), Customs Service, and police may suppress or confiscate religious literature of which they do not approve. The CRA has restricted the right to publish, import, and distribute religious literature solely to registered central offices of religious organizations, of which seven now exist: an interdenominational Bible Society; the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan; two Islamic centers; and Russian Orthodox, Full Gospel, Baptist, and Roman Catholic offices.

In this reporting period, the Government restricted the quantity of Christian literature in the Uzbek language that registered central religious organizations could import into the country. Authorities also confiscated Christian literature in Uzbek that had been legally imported into the country. In previous reporting periods, Government authorities told church leaders that all Christian literature in Uzbek is considered contraband, even if it was legally imported. For historical and cultural reasons, evangelical pastors generally preach in Russian while offering limited services in the Uzbek language—the official national language and the one linked most

closely to the majority Muslim population. In this reporting period, the CRA allowed some materials, such as limited quantities of Uzbek translations of some books of the Bible. The Government requires the Bible Society to file regular reports on its printing, importing, and translating activities.

The Government may confiscate and in some cases destroy illegally imported religious literature. In July 2006 the Customs Service detained a shipment of 500 Russian-language Bibles and other literature that had been shipped to the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Chirchik, based on the CRA's finding that the literature was not necessary. The literature was impounded through the end of the reporting period and subject to storage charges payable by the Jehovah's Witnesses, despite a request from the organization to reroute the shipment to Kazakhstan. Authorities sometimes burn literature, including Bibles that have been confiscated from members of unregistered religious communities. Forum 18 News Agency reported that following a raid on a Baptist church in Karshi on August 27, 2006, a court ordered the burning of seized Christian literature, including a Bible, hymnbooks, and multiple copies of the Old Testament Book of Proverbs in Uzbek.

The International Post Office in Tashkent scrutinizes all incoming packages and sends examples of any religious material to the CRA for further examination and approval. In the event that the CRA bans the materials, it mails a letter to the intended recipient and the sender explaining the rejection by the committee. The CRA has denied entry into Uzbekistan of both Christian and Muslim titles.

The Government tightly controls access to Muslim publications and requires a statement in every domestic publication (books, pamphlets, CDs, and movies) indicating the source of its publication authority. Many books are published with the phrase "permission for this book was granted by the CRA" or "this book is recommended by the CRA," thus indicating official sanction. Generally, only books published under the Muslim Board's imprint "Movarounnahr" contain these phrases. Other works published under the imprint of the state-owned Sharq or Adolat Publishing Houses do not appear to require CRA approval, even when they deal with Islamic law. A few works in Arabic, imported from abroad, are sometimes available from book dealers. More controversial literature, if available, is not displayed, but available only upon request. Possession of literature by authors deemed to be extremists, or of any illegally imported or produced literature, may lead to arrest and prosecution. The Government categorically prohibits HT leaflets.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to commit serious abuses of religious freedom. The Government's campaign against extremist Muslim groups resulted in numerous serious human rights abuses during the period covered by this report. The campaign was largely directed at suspected IMU members or other terrorists, as well as suspected HT members. This ongoing campaign has resulted in the arrest of many observant, non-extremist Muslims, as well as allegations, dozens of them confirmed, that law enforcement officials have physically mistreated or tortured hundreds, perhaps thousands over the years.

Authorities often severely mistreat persons arrested on suspicion of extremism, using torture, beatings, and particularly harsh prison conditions, typically sentencing these individuals to 7- to 12-year terms. Some defendants, particularly those also accused of terrorist activity, received sentences of up to 20 years. Even slight involvement with HT, such as attending a Qu'ran study session or possessing an HT leaflet, can draw a sentence of several years' imprisonment.

There were no further developments in the September 2005 death of Islamic cleric Shavkat Madumarov, who died in custody 3 days after he was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment for membership in a banned Islamic group. Although specific information was difficult to obtain, human rights and other observers maintained that prisoners frequently die of diseases such as tuberculosis, contracted during their confinement.

In 2004 the Supreme Court issued a decree definitively banning the use of evidence obtained by torture or other illegal means. The Government has since taken limited administrative steps to eliminate torture in detention, but there were numerous reports that such treatment remained routine and systematic.

There were no developments in the April 19, 2006, conviction of eight men from the town of Yangiyul, Tashkent Province, on charges of membership in an unregistered religious organization, following a trial at which the defendants testified they had been beaten and tortured. There were also no new developments in the case of nine persons convicted in April 2005 and sentenced to prison terms of 6 to 13 years on religious extremism charges, amid allegations that law enforcement officials tortured them to provoke confessions.

There were no new developments in the following cases: the February 2005 conviction of 2 Sufi Muslims who claimed that authorities planted HT leaflets on them and tortured them, 23 alleged extremists whose October 2004 convictions were based on testimony police obtained through torture, or the October 2004 criminal conviction of the imam of a Karshi mosque (erroneously cited in the 2005 and 2006 reports as a Navoi mosque) and 16 members who admitted only to being adherents of Islam.

The Government's anti-extremism campaign targeted followers of former Tashkent Imam Abidkhan Nazarov, nine of whose followers were deported from Kazakhstan in late November 2005. Uzbekistan courts tried, convicted, and sentenced seven of them to an average of 6 years' imprisonment on charges of Islamic extremism. Authorities committed the eighth, Shoirmat Shorakhmetov, to an institution for the criminally insane. The ninth, former Tashkent Imam Rukhitdin Fakhrutdinov, was sentenced on September 6, 2006, to 17 years in prison on charges of extremism and involvement in the 1999 Tashkent car bombings. Court guards barred trial monitors from the proceedings. There were no developments in the May 2004 disappearance of Imam Nazarov's eldest son, Husnuddin Nazarov.

In thousands of cases in previous reporting periods, authorities asserted HT membership based solely on outward expressions of devout belief or have made false assertions of HT membership as a pretext for prosecuting those of moderate religious belief. In this reporting period, authorities targeted individuals whose relatives were already in prison on charges of extremism or have served as witnesses in other trials. Estimates from credible sources in previous reporting periods suggested that as many as 4,500 of the estimated 5,000 to 5,500 political prisoners being held in detention were imprisoned based on alleged HT membership.

During the reporting period, at least 77 persons, and possibly many more, were convicted of membership in HT. In many of these cases there were allegations of torture and coercion or of targeting individuals whose family members were in jail or who had testified as defense witnesses at other HT trials. The circumstances of the other convictions were unclear, as observers were not able to attend many of the trials.

On April 18, 2007, the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted Gulnora Valijonova of HT membership and sentenced her to 6 years' imprisonment. According to Human Rights Watch and an independent human rights activist, who monitored the trial, the Government failed to provide persuasive proof of her membership in HT and it appeared that she was targeted because several members of her family were in prison on extremist charges.

On October 25, 2006, the Samarkand Province Criminal Court convicted eight men of HT membership and sentenced three defendants to between 5 and 8 years' imprisonment; the remaining defendants were given suspended sentences. Several defendants alleged that their testimony had been coerced under torture, and the trial verdict noted the torture allegations. On September 22, 2006, in a trial closed to journalists and human rights activists, the Tashkent City Court convicted seven men of HT membership and sentenced them to between 10 and 13 years' imprisonment. Although the men confessed to the charges, their lawyers claimed that they confessed only after being threatened by the authorities. On August 3 and August 11, 2006, courts in Tashkent Province convicted a total of 29 men of HT membership in two separate trials and sentenced them to between 1 and 13 years in prison. Several defendants in the two trials testified that their confessions had been coerced through severe beatings. On August 10, 2006, the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted 5 men of HT membership and sentenced them to between 12 and 15 years' imprisonment. The five defendants alleged in open court that they had been tortured, but the allegations were not investigated by the court. Relatives of the five men also told human rights activists that they were threatened by authorities and ordered not to talk about the case.

The six Andijon women who were arrested on April 20, 2006 and charged with possession and dissemination of HT materials were convicted on August 14, 2006 under the Criminal Code and sentenced each to between 5 and 6 years' imprisonment.

It was difficult to estimate precisely the number of persons arrested on false charges of extremism and difficult to know how many of those were under suspicion because of their religious observance. In previous reporting periods, there were accounts of authorities arbitrarily arresting a large percentage of those taken into custody on charges of extremism. Authorities appeared to suspect individuals belonging to Muslim organizations and Muslims who meet privately to pray or study Islam of extremism.

Persons accused of "Wahhabism" faced abuse ranging from job loss to physical abuse and long imprisonment. During the reporting period, at least 25 defendants

were convicted on nonspecific charges of affiliation with "Wahhabi" groups in nine separate trials in Tashkent City and Tashkent Province alone. In April 2007, 6 men in Surkhandarya province were convicted belonging to a Wahhabist sect and sentenced to between 3 and 6 years' imprisonment. According to a reliable source, the confessions of the defendants were extracted through torture. On February 14, 2007, the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted two women on charges of "Wahhabism" and subjected them to fines. On December 19, 2006, the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted Shoakmal Nosirov and Farkhod Muminov of belonging to a Wahhabist sect and sentenced them to between 6 and 9 years' imprisonment. The men were arrested after organizing a camp for 50 children that included Qur'an reading contests. Most of the children's fathers were in prison on religious extremist charges. In a separate trial on September 12, 2006, the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted nine defendants and sentenced 8 of them to 6 years' imprisonment; the ninth defendant received a sentence of 8 years.

The Government continued to prosecute persons suspected of involvement in the Islamic group Akromiya. According to religious experts, Akromiya is a religious movement that promotes business, not extremism. On February 28, 2007, the Tashkent Province Criminal Court convicted Abdumalik Ibragimov of membership in Akromiya and sentenced him to 8 years' imprisonment. On July 21, 2006, the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted at least eight, and possibly as many as 45 men, as a group on charges of Akromiya membership. Abdusamat Karimov was sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment. Ilkhomjon Yuldoshev was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment. The sentences of the other defendants were not reported.

During the reporting period, authorities for the first time sentenced a Christian pastor on criminal charges for religious activities. On January 21, 2007, Andijon authorities arrested pastor Dmitry Shestakov, leader of a registered Full Gospel Pentecostal congregation. On March 9, 2007, the Andijon Province Criminal Court convicted Shestakov and sentenced him to 4 years in a labor colony on charges of organizing an illegal religious group, inciting religious hatred, and distributing religious extremist literature. After a new trial on May 25, 2007, Shestakov was transferred from an open work camp to a harsher labor camp in Navoi.

There were no developments in the case of alleged Akromiya members Akhad Ziyodkhojayev, Bokhodir Karimov, and Abdubosid Zakirov, convicted in Tashkent on July 25, 2005, of participation in a religious extremist group, along with other charges, and serving sentences of 15½ to 16 years' imprisonment. There were also no new developments in the case of seven food vendors sentenced in March 2005 in Syrdarya to 8 to 9 years based on their alleged membership in Akromiya.

The Government branded the Islamic missionary group Tabligh Jamoat ("Outreach Society") as extremist. Eleven Tabligh Jamoat members sentenced in October 2004 in Andijon to 5-year terms remained incarcerated; most of the more recent cases resulted in fines, amnesties or light sentences.

In this reporting period, sources noted that some prisoners convicted of religious extremism were held separately from "ordinary" prisoners and were treated more harshly by prison guards. Shortly before their expected release, such prisoners also were retried for organizing extremist cells within prison and had their prison terms extended. In previous reporting periods, there were reports that prison authorities did not allow many prisoners suspected of Islamic extremism to practice their religion freely and, in some circumstances, did not allow them to possess a Qur'an. Prison authorities also often did not permit inmates to pray five times a day or to adjust work and meal schedules for the Ramadan fast. As authorities still did not allow visits by independent outside monitors to places of detention, there was no reliable way of knowing whether these conditions persisted or of verifying reports that religious prisoners were beaten or subjected to especially harsh treatment, such as being isolated or beaten for refusing to sign letters of repentance renouncing what the authorities deemed religious extremism.

Authorities often harass or arrest family members of persons wanted in connection with Islamic political activities or already jailed in connection with those activities. Although there are exceptions, in many cases the relative's only crime is association.

In previous reporting periods, there were several cases in which authorities detained women for participating in or organizing demonstrations demanding the release of male relatives jailed on suspicion of Islamic extremism. There were no such reports in this reporting period; however, authorities appeared to target women whose husbands were in prison. On April 27, 2007, the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted seven of the eight women arrested for their alleged HT membership but released the seven with suspended sentences. Human Rights Watch stated that although the eight women were accused of forming a HT "cohort," it was clear from witness testimony that the women did not all know each other. The only facts link-

ing the women together were that they all had husbands or close relatives in prison and that they all had testified as witnesses in previous trials. In contrast to previous years, there were no reports that police insulted or forced some women to remove their head coverings.

In previous reporting periods, there were reports that police planted narcotics, ammunition, and religious leaflets on citizens to justify their arrests, and that police arrested many of those with outward signs of religious observance, such as traditional clothing or beards. It was not possible to determine whether the absence of new reports reflected improvement or a decrease in information flow.

There were also reports that authorities tortured and beat evangelical Christians or failed to punish community members who did so. No arrests were made in connection with the December 18, 2006, attack by hired thugs on a Pentecostal Church deacon. There were no new developments in the June 2005 alleged torture of a Pentecostal Christian in Tashkent reported in numerous media outlets.

Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. Police occasionally broke up meetings of unregistered evangelical congregations and detained their members. With a few exceptions, authorities often charged those detained with administrative fines of 50 to 100 times the minimum wage.

As in previous years, there were numerous reports that Christian evangelicals were detained, often for a week or more. A reliable source reported that on April 7, 2007, police raided the service of the unregistered Baptist Church of Guliston and detained its pastor, Victor Klimov, who was charged under several articles of the Administrative Code. On February 8, 2007, Samarkand police arrested a Kazakh citizen pastor affiliated with the Greater Grace Church and held him in detention for 11 days.

Hudoer Pardaev and Igor Kim, members of God's Love Pentecostal Church from the Jizzak region, were sentenced on June 12, 2007, to 10 days in prison for "illegally" teaching religion by the Yangiabad District Court.

On January 15, 2007, police in Nukus reportedly raided a Presbyterian church service held in a private home and arrested 18 worshipers. Authorities charged several on violations of the Administrative Code and fined them. One detainee, Salavat Serikbayev, was tried on criminal charges of teaching religion illegally. On May 10, 2007, the Nukus Criminal Court convicted Serikbayev but released him with a 2-year suspended sentence, during which time he is on probation and prohibited from traveling abroad and required to pay 20 percent of his earnings to the state. On April 9, 2007, a second detainee, Pastor Grigory Ten, was fined $490 (621,000 soum) for several violations of the Administrative Code, a large sum for residents of Karakalpakstan.

On August 24, 2006, police raided a house in the village of Uch-kiliz (near Termez) and detained 17 members of the Union of Independent Churches, many of whom were subsequently beaten. Most of the detainees were freed within 24 hours, but five of them were held until September 4, 2006.

In this reporting period, there were several reported instances of the Government raiding services and imposing fines for worshipping, teaching, proselytizing, or other unauthorized religious activity. Although the authorities tolerated the existence of many Christian evangelical groups, they strictly enforced the law's ban on proselytizing, and often harassed, detained or fined those who openly tried to convert Muslims to Christianity. On April 12, 2007, Bukhara provincial authorities fined a local Pentecostal $56 (70,000 soum) on administrative charges of teaching religion without specialized training. On May 16, 2007, two members of Dmitry Shestakov's Full Gospel Church in Andijon were fined approximately $20 (25,200 soum) for obstruction of justice.

During the period of this report, the Government particularly targeted Full Gospel (Pentecostal) churches. This targeting continued a pattern from the previous reporting period. In December 2006 the pastor of the Resurrection Pentecostal Church in Andijon, which had long been denied registration, was fined $85 (109,500 soum) for holding "illegal" meetings. Under intense pressure from local authorities and mahalla leaders, the Resurrection Pentecostal Church decided to close its congregation in June 2007.

A reliable source reported that on December 27, 2006, the Nukus town court fined Makset Djabbarbergenov, the pastor of an unregistered Christian church, $440 (540,000 soum) for several violations of the Administrative Code. On October 25, 2006, six members of the Separated Baptists Church were fined between $85 (108,000 soum) and $430 (540,000 soum) by the Karshi town court for violating article 240 of the Administrative Code. A reliable source reported that on December 7, 2006, the Karshi town court dropped or reduced the fines against four of the members.

A reliable source reported that authorities dropped charges against three members of the Jesus Christ Charismatic Church in Tashkent who were detained for several days in April 2006 while engaged in humanitarian activities at a children's hospital.

Jehovah's Witnesses also came under particular scrutiny and occasionally faced arrest on charges of proselytizing. On June 6, 2007, Dilafruz Arziyeva, a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses Samarkand congregation, was convicted of illegally teaching religion and sentenced to 2 years of corrective labor. On May 14, 2007, another member of the Jehovah's Witnesses Samarkand congregation, Irfan Hamidov, was also convicted of the same charge and sentenced to 2 years' detention in a labor camp after a trial in which witnesses' testimony favorable to his case was erased from the record.

On April 2, 2007, local police disrupted approximately five Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in three cities during annual worship services commemorating the death of Jesus. There were reports that one worshiper in Samarkand was injured when a police officer beat him on the head. These disruptions were far less severe than in 2006 and 2005, when hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses were taken into custody, several were reportedly beaten, and many were subjected to large fines and brief administrative detention following raids on annual memorial services in several cities.

There were several cases during the reporting period in which authorities deported members of religious minority groups from the country, presumably based upon their religious affiliation. Forum 18 reported that in mid-June 2007, a Tajik Pentecostal who had lived in the country for more than 10 years was deported to Tajikistan. The Pentecostal was arrested after meeting in a church member's house in Tashkent in late May and held in jail for 22 days before being deported. On August 11, 2006, Interior Ministry officers in Tashkent deported Ivan Bychkov, a member of the Bethany Baptist Church, to Russia, reportedly without explanation. Bychkov, a Russian citizen, had been resident in Tashkent for many years. On September 5, 2006, Tashkent authorities deported Viktoria Khrypunova, the Russian-citizen wife of Pastor Sergei Khrypunov of the Bethany Baptist Church. As in Bychkov's case, authorities reportedly gave no explanation for Khrypunova's deportation.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

Since 2003 the Government has allowed former Mufti Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf to publish widely on a variety of religious topics in both print and electronic formats. His popular Islamic Web site remained unblocked by the Government and he continued to host a popular radio program on Islam and to teach at the Islamic University.

Authorities allowed a small number of unregistered mosques to reopen, both in cities and in the countryside. In addition, non state sanctioned imams continued to work, particularly in rural areas, under the close watch of religious officials. Reports noted that the atmosphere in the Muslim community has improved somewhat, as observant Muslims were allowed to practice their faith within these controlled environments.

The Government continued to respect the military pacifism of Jehovah's Witnesses. The draft board routinely gave exemptions. On April 2, Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Uzbekistan encountered far less harassment than in the past 2 years in the course of their annual memorial services commemorating Jesus' death.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to tolerate the use of head coverings by Muslim women. The hijab was seen frequently in Tashkent, the more religiously conservative parts of the Ferghana Valley, and in other regions. The CRA took the position that women should not be barred from educational institutions on the basis of their religious dress and actively assisted women who had been previously expelled to gain readmission to their universities. During the period covered by this report, it was more common to see women on the street wearing the hijab and, much less frequently, the veil.

There were reports of recent cases where authorities have dismissed charges against Protestants after their lawyer protested procedural matters or evidence. Forum 18 reported that in March 2007 prosecutors tried to bring a case against Vyacheslav Tskhe, a youth leader of the registered Grace Pentecostal Church in the Mirzo-Ulugbek District of Tashkent, for several violations of the Administrative

Code. However, after Tskhe protested to several state agencies about the actions of a police officer involved in the case, the charges against Tskhe were dropped and the police officer was reprimanded. On February 10, 2007, police raided a house in the town of Gazli (near Bukhara) and detained six members of the Pentecostal Church. The charges against them were later dropped and the arresting police officers disciplined. On February 5, 2007, the Chilanzar District Court in Tashkent dropped charges against five members of the Pentecostal church who had been charged with violating several articles of the Administrative Code.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Uzbek society is generally tolerant of religious diversity but not of proselytizing. The population maintained its long tradition of secularism and tolerance. In particular, Muslim, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Jewish leaders reported high levels of acceptance in society. Evangelical or Pentecostal Christian churches and churches with ethnic Uzbek converts encountered difficulties stemming from discrimination. There were persistent reports that ethnic Uzbeks who converted to Christianity faced discrimination and harassment.

State-controlled media in some cases encouraged societal prejudice against evangelical Christians. After state television featured a two-part documentary directed against Christian evangelicals in November 2006, members of a leading Tashkent Pentecostal church reported severe harassment and escalating threats from their local community, culminating in a December 18, 2006, attack by hired thugs on a church deacon. Some of the articles in the state-controlled press included quotes from Russian Orthodox clerics criticizing evangelical activity.

There was no pattern of discrimination against Jews. Synagogues, Hebrew education, Jewish cultural events, and the publication of a community newspaper take place openly and undisturbed. Many Jews have emigrated to the United States and Israel, most likely because of bleak economic prospects and connections to families abroad, rather than anti-Jewish sentiment. There are Jewish kindergartens in Tashkent and Samarkand officially teaching Jewish culture. Investigations established that anti-Semitism was not a motive in the February 2006 death of a Tashkent Jewish community leader, Avraam Yagudayev, or the June 2006 killings of a 20-year-old secretary to prominent Tashkent-based Rabbi David Gurevich, Karina Loifer, and her mother.

Unlike in previous years, there was only one report of individuals being charged with the distribution of HT leaflets, which often contain strong anti-Semitic rhetoric, during the period of this report. On August 10, 2006, the Uzbek Customs Committee stated on a Government-run Web site that two Kazakh citizens were arrested for possessing HT books, magazines and leaflets.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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 maintained contact with the CRA, as well as with religious leaders and human rights activists. When the Embassy learned of difficulties faced by religious groups, whether observant Muslims and Christians, or faith-based foreign aid organizations, it intervened on their behalf when possible, taking such actions as attempting to contact Government officials and attending trials. U.S. diplomats monitored Jehovah's Witnesses' worship services in Tashkent on April 2, 2007, to help ensure the congregations' freedom to observe their annual Memorial of Jesus Christ's death. The Embassy continued to raise concerns with the Government, despite a downturn in the bilateral relationship between the United States and Uzbekistan.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officials met with numerous Muslim clergymen and other religious figures to discuss and monitor religious freedom concerns. Members of the religious community, as well as other Uzbek opinion leaders, routinely receive information from the Embassy's Information Resource Center. Embassy officials urged the Government to allow more freedom of religious expression and more mosque registrations. U.S. officials, both in Washington, D.C., and in Tashkent, have encouraged the Government to revise its laws on religion, including revising the 100-member minimum required to form a religious group, repealing the ban on proselytizing, lifting restrictions on the importation 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. Government sponsors exchange and educational programs that are specifically designed to promote religious tolerance and to expand religious freedom. A 4-year Comparative Religious Studies Program, funded by the U.S. Government and managed by the University of Washington, provided for exchange of experts and professors from five local universities in order to promote religious tolerance. In 2006, the U.S. Embassy invited a group of eight Muslim leaders on an International Visitor Leadership Program visit to the United States; while they initially accepted the invitation, all invitees later deferred their participation due to political sensitivities on the part of the Government. The U.S. Embassy regularly disseminated information on freedom of religious practices in the United States.

The U.S. Government promotes religious freedom generally as part of its human rights programming, although the Government of Uzbekistan's closure of NGOs during the reporting period seriously hampered these efforts.

On November 14, 2006, the Secretary of State designated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Following the CPC designation, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom met several times with the Ambassador of the country to establish a dialogue aimed at improving religious freedom. At the Government's invitation, the Ambassador at Large visited the country the week of June 25, 2007 to pursue those discussions.

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 170 square miles and a population of 77,000. According to the 2001 census report, which has the most reliable figures available, 74 percent of the population is Christian. The Anglican Church is the largest religious denomination, accounting for an estimated 26 percent of the population. The Methodist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic churches account for less than 10 percent each. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that includes most independent evangelical churches, claims an estimated 25 percent of the population, and Jehovah's Witnesses number more than 1,000 members. The total number of non-Christians is small; they include an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Rastafarians, more than 200 Muslims, nearly 200 Hindus, and approximately 50 members of the Baha'i Faith. There are more than 4,000 atheists or persons who do not follow a particular religion.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government is secular; however, the Government maintained a close relationship with the Antigua Christian Council. The Prime Minister is responsible for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, whose role is to coordinate and facilitate greater interaction between churches, other religious organizations, and the Government, and to facilitate the free movement of pastors into the country.

The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

The Constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, groups are required to incorporate to own property. Groups that are registered receive tax and duty-free concessions, especially for building and renovation.

Public schools are secular; religious education is not part of the curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, an aspect of their religious ritual, was prohibited.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom; however, Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also discussed these issues with local religious groups.

ARGENTINA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government also increasingly promoted interfaith dialogue and engaged local religious groups via advisory committees and grassroots initiatives. Diverse religious groups enjoy tolerance and coexistence, but not necessarily equality, since some vestiges of preferential church-state ties endure for the Roman Catholic Church.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 37 million, according to the 2001 census. Accurate estimates of religious affiliation are difficult to obtain; however, information supplied by the National Registry of Worship, various religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) produced the following estimates in 2005, which do not necessarily reflect active religious practice: Catholics, 70 percent of the population; Protestants, 9 percent; Muslims, 1.5 percent; Jews, 0.8 percent; other religious groups, 2.5 percent; and the remainder, no declared religious affiliation. Estimates often are based on outdated census data and questionable presumptions, such as assuming that immigrants of Middle Eastern origin were Muslim. The Islamic Center estimates that only one of three Middle Eastern immigrants is Muslim. A significant portion of the population of Middle Eastern heritage is of Syrian or Lebanese extraction and approximately half of these immigrants are Orthodox Catholic or Maronite. Of the 500,000 to 600,000 in the Muslim community, the Islamic Center estimated that 90 percent are Sunni and 10 percent Shiite; the Islamic Center and members of the King Fahd Mosque estimated that 70 percent of the growing population of converts converted to Sufi Islam.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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.

The Constitution states that the Government "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith" and provides the Catholic Church with a variety of subsidies not available to other religious groups. These subsidies, estimated at $4 million per annum, have been described as compensation for expropriation of properties that belonged to Catholic institutions in the colonial era. For instance, the Government pays monthly salaries or allowances to Catholic diocesan and auxiliary bishops,

Catholic seminarians, Catholic border parishes, a group of secular priests, and retired Catholic bishops. These payments are exempt from Federal deductions for the equivalent of income taxes, social security, and medicare. The Government doubled the bishops' salaries in 2006 from approximately US $1,300 (ARS 4,000) to approximately US $2,600 (ARS 8,000) monthly. The Catholic Church also enjoys institutional privileges such as school subsidies, a large degree of autonomy for parochial schools, licensing preferences for radio frequencies, prison chaplains, and prisoner access.

The press characterized the relationship between the Government and the Catholic Church as tense, noting President Kirchner's refusal to meet with any religious leaders and veiled criticisms of leaders of the Catholic Church for their support of labor strikes in Santa Cruz province, their criticism of the Government's sex education policies, and their critique of the country's socio-political situation. In October 2006 retired Catholic Monsignor Joaquín Piña led a civic coalition against a single-issue referendum proposed by the Governor of Misiones Province, Carlos Rovira, which would have changed the provincial constitution to allow indefinite reelection of governors. Piña's coalition defeated the referendum, potentially contributing to the tense church-state relationship. In April 2007 the Catholic bishops met and released a statement condemning proposals to legalize abortion and same-sex civil unions. In May 2007 the press reported that President Kirchner met with Piña as a political gesture toward the Catholic Church.

The Secretariat of Worship in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and Worship (MFA) is responsible for conducting the Government's relations with religious organizations. In addition both the Federal Government and the Government of the Province of Buenos Aires promote multilateral dialogue with diverse sectors of the community, including religious representatives. For instance, the Government consulted with religious representatives, among others, to determine how best to address increased poverty as a result of the 2001–2002 financial crisis.

Tax exemption and registration requirements are key issues for religious groups. Religious organizations that wish to obtain tax-exempt status must register with the Secretariat of Worship and report periodically to maintain their status. The Secretariat for Worship considers the following criteria when determining whether to grant or withdraw registration: a place to worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy. Registration is not required for private religious services, such as those conducted in homes, but is necessary for public activities. Well-established religious groups value this system, while fledgling and less conventional religious movements find the system discriminatory.

In September/October 2006, a council of advisors representing an array of non-Catholic religious groups submitted to the executive branch of the Federal Government a draft law to promote greater religious freedom. By the end of the reporting period Congress had not received the draft law.

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 that foreign missionaries were denied visas, but German evangelical and South African Jama'at al-Tabligh members reportedly experienced difficulties obtaining visas.

The Government continued relaxing restrictions on indigenous groups and improving recognition. For instance, the Government increasingly accepted indigenous names for the civil name registry and increasingly included information in school books regarding indigenous groups and their belief systems. The Constitution provided for this increased recognition in 1994. In the past few years, the Government sponsored initiatives, such as the Ministry of Education's National Program of Intercultural Bilingual Education, to help in reaching this goal.

The National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), a Government agency under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, is charged with promoting social and cultural pluralism and combating discriminatory attitudes. INADI, whose board includes representatives of the major religious groups, 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." The agency also conducts educational programs, supports victims of discrimination, and promotes proactive measures to prevent discrimination.

Three Christian holy days are observed as national holidays: Good Friday, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. In April 2006 legislation passed which extended authorized paid leave (from 3 days to 7) for those observing the Jewish holy days of New Year, the Days of Atonement, and Passover, and also for those observing the holy days of the Islamic New Year.

Public education is secular; however, students may request instruction in the religion of their choice, which may be conducted in school or at a religious institution. Many churches and synagogues operate private schools, including seminaries and universities.

The Secretariat of Worship sought to promote religious harmony by sending official representatives to events such as religious freedom conferences, rabbinical ordinations, Rosh Hashana and Eid al-Fitr celebrations, and religious activities held by Protestant and Orthodox churches.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In February 2005 the Government called for the removal of the military's Chaplain General, Bishop Antonio Baseotto, due to controversial comments the Bishop had made regarding the Government's reproductive health policies. (The position of Chaplain General is appointed by the Vatican, although it is subsidized by the Government.) Since the Vatican refused to remove the Bishop, he remained nominally in his position until he retired in 2006.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The Delegation of Argentine Israelite Associations (DAIA) maintains a database tracking anti-Semitic incidents. In 2006 DAIA registered 586 complaints, among them 25 threats (including bomb threats and threats of other physical violence), and 392 incidents of anti-Semitic propaganda (including graffiti and literature distribution). DAIA indicated that these statistics represented a 35 percent increase in anti-Semitic acts in 2006 compared with 2005. The MFA reported that they had not received any official complaints from religious groups in 2006.

On March 15, 2007, Interpol's Executive Committee recommended by consensus the issuance of international capture notices for six suspects wanted for the 1994 terrorist bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA). The Government of Iran appealed the decision and Interpol's General Assembly is expected to vote on the matter in November 2007.

On November 21, 2006, during a soccer match, Defensores de Belgrano fans chanted anti-Semitic songs against Atlanta's fans and players. Because of a similar incident in 2000, the referees were instructed to end the match. The lead referee did not comply; lawsuits were filed against him, the police responsible for the security of the event, and the president of Defensores de Belgrano, who later apologized and condemned the incident. INADI and the Argentine Football Association together sought to strengthen measures against discriminatory expressions in the stadiums.

During the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, elements of the Buenos Aires Shiite population as well as leftist extremists demonstrated near the Israeli Embassy. Although a political issue, the demonstrations took on religious overtones when small groups utilized anti-Semitic slogans, signs, and graffiti. Other groups, including the Lebanese community and pro-Israeli youth, held counterdemonstrations and peace demonstrations.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Argentina is a member of the International Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. In January 2007 the Government cosponsored a U.S.-drafted U.N. resolution that condemns without any reservation any denial of the Holocaust and urges all member states unreservedly to reject any denial of the Holocaust as a historical event, either in full or in part, or any activities to that end. On April 19, 2007, President Kirchner addressed the Jewish community during a commemoration ceremony of the 64th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, where he paid homage to the lives lost during the Holocaust. Alluding to the 1994 AMIA bombing, the President also reiterated his administration's commitment to pursuing justice.

In addition to a draft Federal law, 2006 witnessed increased Government-sponsored interfaith dialogue and increased inclusion of minority religious groups and indigenous groups in this dialogue.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

NGOs actively promoted interreligious understanding. Ecumenical attendance was common at important religious events. NGOs promoting religious fraternity included the Argentine Jewish-Christian Brotherhood (an affiliate of the International Council of Christians and Jews), the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom, the Foundation for Education for Peace, and the Federation of Arab Entities (Latin America), known as FEARAB. Long-standing cooperation among FEARAB (Latin America), the Islamic Center of the Republic of Argentina, DAIA and the AMIA ceased due to the August 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel and related political developments.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers met periodically with various religious leaders and attended events organized by faith-based organizations and NGOs that addressed issues of religious freedom.

BAHAMAS

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 13,939 square miles and a population of 340,000, including those residing illegally. The country is ethnically diverse and includes a Haitian minority of legal and illegal immigrants estimated at 40,000 to 60,000 persons and a white/European minority that is nearly as large.

More than 90 percent of the population professed a religion, and anecdotal evidence suggests that most attend services regularly. The country's religious profile reflects its diversity. Protestant Christian denominations including Baptists (35 percent), Anglicans (15 percent), Pentecostals (8 percent), Church of God (5 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (5 percent) and Methodists (4 percent) are in the majority, but there are also significant Roman Catholic (14 percent) and Greek Orthodox populations. Smaller Jewish, Baha'i, Jehovah's Witness and Muslim communities also are active. A small number of Bahamians and Haitians, particularly those living in the Family Islands, practice Obeah, a version of voodoo. A small but stable number of citizens identify themselves as Rastafarians, while some members of the 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution specifically forbids infringement of a person's freedom to choose and change his or her religion and guarantees the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The law provides effective remedies to enforce these rights.

Christianity is the dominant religion. Political and public discourse often refer to the country's strong Christian heritage and Christian themes in general, and the Constitution requires the Government to guarantee respect for Christian values. Religious groups are free to train their clergy.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Whit Monday are national holidays. The Government meets regularly with religious leaders, both publicly and privately, to discuss social, political, and economic issues.

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 if they legally incorporate.

Religion is recognized as an academic subject at Government schools, and it is included in mandatory standardized achievement and certificate tests for all students. The country's Christian heritage has a heavy influence on religion classes in Government-supported schools, which focus on the study of Christian philosophy, Biblical texts, and, to a lesser extent, comparative and non-Christian religions presented in a Christian context. The Constitution allows students, or their guardians in the case of minors, to decline to participate in religious education and observance in schools; this right, although rarely exercised, was respected in practice.

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, proselytize, and practice their religion without restriction.

Haitian immigrants brought with them elements of voodoo. The practice of Obeah is illegal, and those caught practicing it or attempting to intimidate, steal, inflict disease, or restore a person to health under the guise of Obeah are liable to 3 months' imprisonment.

Some Rastafarians claimed discrimination by the Government, citing obligatory haircuts, police harassment, and unequal treatment of Rastafarian students. Rastafarians met with Government officials during the reporting period to discuss their concerns and cited progress in their discussions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Several interdenominational organizations and ecumenical movements were active that freely expressed their opinions on social, political, and economic issues. Christian pastors exerted significant influence over politics and society.

Society was at times less tolerant of religions perceived as foreign, particularly Rastafarianism, Obeah, and voodoo. Some citizens publicly called the poverty and political unrest in Haiti signs of God's disapproval of the practice of voodoo. However, there were no related reports of harassment or violence against persons or property.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses 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 respected this right in practice.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote 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 a population of 277,000. According to the most resent official census in 2000, more than 95 percent of the population is considered Christian, although persons may not be active in any particular denomination. The Anglican Church constitutes the largest religious group, with 70,000 members; an estimated 67 percent are active in the Church. The next largest group is the Seventh-day Adventists, numbering 16,000 members, 10,000 of whom are active. There are 11,000 Roman Catholics; an estimated 20 percent are active. Pentecostals numbered 7,000; more than 50 percent are active. Methodists numbered 5,000 according to church officials, although many more claimed Methodist affiliation in the previous official census; an estimated 60 percent of members are active. There are 2,500 members of Jehovah's Witnesses; more than 95 percent are active. 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 4,000 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 200 Barbadians, comprise the rest of the growing Muslim community. There are three mosques and an Islamic center. Other minority religious groups include Rastafarians, Hindus, Buddhists, and members 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Religious groups were required to register with the Government to obtain duty-free import privileges or tax benefits, but no complaints were received that the process was onerous.

Foreign missionaries were required to apply for entry visas and obtained them easily.

Religious instruction is included in the public school curriculum as "values education." The focus is on Christianity, but representatives from minority religious groups are also invited to speak to students.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, as an aspect of their religious ritual, was illegal.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom; however, Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

The Barbados Christian Council and the Caribbean Conference of Churches conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different Christian denominations.

SECTION IV. U.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 also discussed freedom of religion with local groups and other organizations.

BELIZE

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 300,000. There is a growing mestizo population (48.7 percent), a diminishing Creole component (24.9 percent), a stable Mayan element (10.6 percent), and a Garifuna component (6.1 percent). The balance of the population (9.7 percent) includes Europeans, East Indians, Chinese, Arabs, and North Americans.

According to a 2000 census, Roman Catholics constitute 49.6 percent of the population, Pentecostals 7.4 percent, and Anglicans 5.3 percent. Other religious groups include Baptists (3.5 percent), Methodists (3.5 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (5.2 percent), and Mennonites (4.1 percent). There are approximately 6,000 Nazarenes and modest numbers of Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, 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 lived mostly in the rural districts of Cayo and Orange Walk, members of these groups tend to live in Belize City. Catholics are numerous throughout the country and constitute the majority in all but two of the country's six districts, Belize and Cayo, where they represent a plurality of the population but do not constitute a majority. Approximately 10 percent of citizens identify themselves as nonbelievers or members of no religious congregation.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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." A 2002 amendment to the Constitution expanded the appointed Senate to 12 persons, one of whom is appointed by the Governor General acting in accordance with the advice of the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches. The membership of these organizations includes several Christian denominations, among them Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist.

Under the Constitution, freedom of religion is part of a broader protection—that of freedom of conscience. In addition, the Constitution provides that no one shall be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to a person's religion or belief. Discrimination on religious grounds is illegal and rarely occurs. 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."

The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Monday, and Christmas are observed as national holidays.

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.

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.

The Constitution stipulates that religious communities may establish "places of education" and states "no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community." Although there is no state religion,

the educational system maintains by statute a strong religious curriculum. The curriculum ties "spirituality" with social studies courses. It requires in both public and private schools that students from kindergarten through sixth grade receive 220 minutes of religious instruction and chapel every week, but school exit exams do not have a section on religion. Catholic holy days are routinely observed as school holidays. The Constitution prohibits any educational institution from compelling a child to receive religious instruction or 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 primary and elementary schools, high schools, and colleges are church-affiliated. There are occasional instances where administrators either do not know the law or misapply it. These are usually corrected through parent-school consultations. In rare cases, the Ministry of Education intervenes to correct the situation.

The Constitution also stipulates that no one shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend services without his or her consent while serving in the armed forces, or while being detained in prison or in any correctional institution. The 850-member Defense Force supported a Catholic chaplain but did not restrict the practice of other religions.

Although the Government has oversight authority over the country's single prison, the institution was managed, and largely financed, by the Kolbe Foundation, a nondenominational Christian nongovernmental organization. Missionaries were active in daily programs at the prison, and at least one lived within the prison compound. Religious conversion was in no way mandatory, but it was part of the primary focus of the prisoner rehabilitation program. Prisoners of any religious group could request and receive visits from ministers of their choice.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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 sought input from a cross-section of the religious community in addressing these problems.

SECTION IV. U.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 also discussed religious freedom with leaders of various religious groups.

BOLIVIA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 9 million. According to a 2001 survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute, 78 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 16 percent is Protestant or evangelical, 3 percent follow other religions of Christian origin, 2.5 percent practice no religion, and less than 0.2 percent claim affiliation with non-Christian faiths, including Islam, the Baha'i Faith, Judaism, Buddhism, and Shinto. Of those who habitually practice their religion, 56.5 percent are Catholic, 36.5 percent Protestant or evangelical, and 7 percent other Christian religions. In urban areas, 80 percent of the population is Catholic, while 14 percent is Protestant or evangelical. In rural areas, 74 percent of the population is Catholic, while 20.5 percent is Protestant or evangelical. Atheists are estimated to constitute an insignificant percentage of the population.

Approximately 55 percent of the population identifies itself as indigenous, with 29 percent Quechua, 24 percent Aymara, 1 percent Chiquitano, and 1 percent Guaraní. Several other indigenous groups are also present, although none represents more than .5 percent of the population. Approximately 30 percent of the population identifies itself as mestizo (of mixed indigenous and European ancestry) and 15 percent as white.

The indigenous population is higher in rural areas, where the formal Catholic Church tends to be weaker due to a lack of resources and to indigenous cultural resistance to Church efforts to replace traditional attitudes with more orthodox Catholic practices and beliefs. For many individuals, identification with Catholicism for centuries coexisted with attachment to traditional beliefs and rituals, with a focus on the Pachamama or Mother Earth figure, as well as on Ekeko, 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.

Sources from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) estimate membership in the Mormon Church at approximately 104,000. Mormons are present throughout the country and have a particularly large presence in Cochabamba, where their temple is one of the largest in the world. The Jewish community is spread throughout the country and has synagogues in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz. Muslims have cultural centers that also serve as mosques in La Paz, Santa Cruz, and Cochabamba that welcome both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. Korean immigrants have their own church in La Paz. Many Korean immigrants and the majority of Chinese and Japanese immigrants settled in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, where there is a university founded by Korean immigrants that has evangelical and Presbyterian ties. There are Buddhist and Shinto communities, as well as a substantial Baha'i community, throughout the country.

Missionaries are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution establishes the state's recognition and support of the Roman Catholic Church; however, in August 2006 a Constituent Assembly convened that was not expected to include such language in a proposed Constitution. In August 2007 the Assembly was scheduled to conclude.

Written agreements between the Government and the Catholic Church formalized the Catholic Church's support in areas of education, health, and social welfare. Although the Government provided the Catholic Church with limited financial support, the Catholic Church's expenditures to provide these services, which otherwise would be the responsibility of the Government, significantly exceeded this support. Government and Catholic leaders expected that these written agreements would remain in force whether or not a new Constitution formally recognized the Church. The Catholic Church exercised a limited degree of political influence through the Catholic Bishops' Conference. By custom the Government sometimes called upon the Catholic Church to arbitrate political disagreements, but this was not formalized in law.

Four Christian holy days are observed as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including non-Catholic religious organizations and missionary groups, seeking to acquire legal representation must register with the Governor's Office of their respective departments to receive authorization. Nonprofit religious organizations and missionary groups must then register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office of the Director of Religion to receive recognition as religious associations. There were no reports that the Government restricted gatherings of nonregistered religious groups, but 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 and does not charge a fee for registration; however, the procedure typically requires legal assistance and can be time-consuming. Some groups have forgone official registration and operate informally. Religious groups receiving funds from abroad may enter into a framework agreement with the Government that lasts 3 years and permits them to enjoy judicial standing similar to that of other NGOs and have tax-free status.

Some public schools provide Catholic religious instruction. By law, it is optional and curricular materials describe it as such. Students face some peer pressure to participate, although this pressure has declined in recent years. Non-Catholic instruction is not available in public schools for students of other religious groups.

The Government did not take an active role in promoting interfaith understanding, although it was represented at interfaith meetings. It worked with Catholic, Protestant, and Mormon organizations on social, health, and education programs. Beginning in 2006 the Government began to stress a revival of indigenous religious beliefs and rituals. Indigenous religious rituals endorsed by the Government occasionally preceded Government events. Government officials attended both Catholic Masses and indigenous religious rituals in the course of their official functions.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Leaders from Islamic, Jewish, Baha'i, Catholic, and indigenous communities continued to hold interfaith meetings throughout the period covered by this report. Although some friction existed between supporters of indigenous religious groups and the Catholic Church, this was not perceived by the Church as discrimination.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials continued to meet regularly with officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, principal religious leaders, and the Papal Nuncio.

BRAZIL

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

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 3,286,488 square miles and a population of 188,078,200. Nearly all major religious groups are present. Many citizens worship in more than one church or participate in the rituals of more than one religion. The 2000 census taken by the Geographic and Statistical Institute of Brazil (IBGE) indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic, although only a small percentage regularly attended Mass. Approximately 15 percent of the population was Protestant, an estimated 85 percent of whom were Pentecostal or evangelical. These groups included the Assemblies of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the Quadrangular Gospel, God is Love, Maranata, Brazil for Christ, House of the Blessing, New Life, and others. Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and others accounted for most of the remaining Protestants and were centered in the south. In the 2000 census, 199,645 residents identified themselves as belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), but the church listed its current membership as 970,903.

According to the 2000 census, there were approximately 214,873 adherents of Buddhism and 151,080 adherents of other oriental religious groups. The Japanese-Brazilian community practiced Shintoism to a limited degree. There are 17,088 adherents of indigenous traditions, and 2,905 Hindus.

Followers of African and syncretic religious groups such as Candomble totaled 127,582, while followers of Umbanda totaled 397,431. There were no statistics on the number of followers of Xango or of Macumba; however, data from the same study indicated that followers of Afro-Brazilian religious groups totaled 0.3 percent of the population.

Followers of spiritism, mainly Kardecists—adherents of the doctrine expounded by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the 19th century—constituted approximately 1.3 percent, with 2,262,401 followers. There were 25,889 practitioners of Spiritualism. An estimated 7 percent did not practice any religion, and approximately 384,000 participants did not respond to the census.

Reliable figures on the number of Muslims do not exist. Muslim leaders estimated that there were between 700,000 and 3 million Muslims, with the lower figure representing those who actively practiced their religion, while the higher estimate included also nominal members. These figures are much higher than the 27,239 Muslims reported in the 2000 census. There are significant Muslim communities in São Paulo, the ABC industrial suburbs of the greater São Paulo city area, and in the Santos area. There are also communities in Parana state in the coastal region and in Curitiba and Foz do Iguazu in the triborder area. The community is overwhelmingly Sunni; the recent Shiite immigrants gravitate to small insular communities in São Paulo, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu, whereas the Sunnis are for the most part completely assimilated into broader society. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt who arrived during the past 25 years. Conversions to Islam have increased recently among non-Arab citizens. There are approximately 52 mosques, Islamic religious centers, and Islamic associations.

According to the Jewish Confederation of Brazil (CONIB), there are 119,560 Jewish persons of whom 60,000 are in São Paulo state and 40,000 in Rio de Janeiro state. Many other cities have smaller Jewish communities.

Foreign missionary groups are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There are no registration requirements for religious groups. There is no favored or state religion, although the Government has a concordat with the Vatican. All religious denominations 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 following holy days are observed as national or regional holidays: Saint Sebastian's Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Saint John's Day, Our Lady of Carmen ("Carmo"), Assumption Day, Our Lady Aparecida, All Souls' Day, Evangelicals Day, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

Public schools are required to offer religious instruction, but neither the Constitution nor legislation defines how this should be done. Religious instruction is optional for students. Each school defines how to offer religious instruction and in which religion, usually in agreement with parent councils. Education is mandatory for all children, but parents are free to send their children to the public or private school of their choice.

The Government restricted the access of nonindigenous persons, including missionaries, to indigenous reserves and required visitors to seek permission from the National Indian Foundation to enter official indigenous areas.

It is illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell books that promote anti-Semitism or racism. The law enables courts to fine or imprison anyone who displays, distributes, or broadcasts anti-Semitic or racist material and mandates a 2- to 5-year prison term for violators.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism was rare; however, there were reports of increasing violence against Jewish persons. Leaders in the Jewish community expressed concern over the continued appearance of anti-Semitic material on Internet Web sites compiled by neo-Nazi and "skinhead" groups. There were reports of anti-Semitic graffiti, harassment, vandalism, and threats via telephone and e-mail. The Government officially equates anti-Semitism to racism.

In May 2007 more than 100 instances of graffiti being painted on the wall of the Shalom Synagogue, on numerous Jewish residences, and throughout Teresópolis (35 miles from Rio de Janeiro), a city with a substantial Jewish presence, occurred. According to the president of the Rio de Janeiro Israelite Federation, it was unclear if the graffiti were anti-Semitic. However, according to the Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism, many had a swastika in addition to a cryptic symbol of an "88" superimposed over an "HH." In 2004 similar incidents occurred.

On August 5, 2006, six men threw Molotov cocktails and rocks at the Beth Jacob Synagogue in Campinas, breaking windows, burning its main door, and painting an anti-Semitic slogan on the sidewalk in front of the temple.

Media reported that a São Paulo Jewish community leader received death threats in late July 2006, probably related to the July–August conflict involving Hezbollah and Israel. Police provided him with personal protection.

In 2005 15 persons were arrested and charged with attempted murder, gang formation, and racism for attacking three Jewish students in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State. After spending more than 100 days in jail, all 15 were freed and awaiting the testimony stage of the process, which started in May 2006. At the end of the reporting period, no trial had been scheduled.

Numerous anti-Semitic Web sites continued to operate, one of which is on a server located in the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There was no national ecumenical movement; however, the National Commission for Religious Dialogue brought together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim 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.

CANADA

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote 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 a population of 33 million. According to a 2001 census, approximately 77.1 percent of the population belonged to Christian denominations or claimed Christianity as its religion. Roman Catholics (44 percent of the population) constituted the largest denomination, followed by Protestant denominations (29 percent). United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and Pentecostal were the largest Protestant groups. The Muslim population stood at 2 percent, and approximately 1.1 percent of the population was Jewish. Other religious groups included Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, each with approximately 1 percent of the population. Several other religions, such as Scientology, Baha'i, Shinto, Taoism, and aboriginal spirituality, each accounted for less than 1 percent. A total of 17 percent claimed no religious affiliation, an increase from 12 percent in the 1996 census.

Approximately two-thirds of the country's net population growth is due to immigration. Most of these immigrants were born in Asia and generally practice different religions than the majority native-born citizens. The majority of immigrants settle in urban areas.

An April 2006 Ipsos Reid Survey of Christian religious attitudes indicated that, while Christian beliefs had remained largely unchanged since 1996, fewer persons (17 percent) attended church on a weekly basis. A 2002 Pew Research Center poll on religious attitudes found that approximately 21 percent of the population attended church on a weekly basis.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The following Christian holy days are national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. The Government grants tax-exempt status to religious institutions through the Charities Directorate of the tax authority, Revenue Canada. This status provides religious institutions with certain Federal and provincial sales tax reductions, rebates, and exemptions, and it requires them to be nonpolitical, send donations only to approved overseas recipients, and undergo periodic audits. Through this same Government-approved charitable status, clergy receive various Federal benefits, including a clergy housing deduction under the tax code and fast-tracking through the immigration system. Individual Canadians who donate to religious tax-exempt institutions receive a Federal tax receipt entitling them to deductions for Federal income tax purposes.

The Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protect the rights or privileges possessed by religious minorities in their public, but denominational, schools at the time of national union in 1867. In practice this protection has meant that some provinces have funded Catholic school education, and some provinces (such as Quebec) have funded Protestant education but under the category of "public," not "private," education. Education falls under the purview of the provinces, not the Federal Government. As such, levels of direct funding and indirect tax benefits for all schools, public as well as private, religious and nonreligious, ranged across the country from 0 to 75 percent.

On November 2, 2005, the U.N. Human Rights Committee reiterated its 1999 ruling that called on the Federal Government to "adopt steps in order to eliminate dis-

crimination on the basis of religion in the funding of schools in Ontario." The ruling, which resulted from a 1996 complaint filed under article 28 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on behalf of an Ontario Jewish parent who was sending his child to a Jewish private school, concluded that Ontario's policy of full and direct public funding for only Catholic but not other religious schools was discriminatory. While the issue of public funding for non-Catholic religious schools in Ontario has been the subject of domestic litigation since 1978, a 1996 Supreme Court ruling confirmed the constitutionality of funding for Catholic separate schools. Some school boards across Ontario have passed resolutions calling for the elimination of the public Catholic school system, but the provincial government has not officially reconsidered its dual system.

There was no official Government council for interfaith dialogue, but the Government provided funding for individual ecumenical projects on a case-by-case basis.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In April 2007 the Jehovah's Witness parents of sextuplets born prematurely in January filed suit against the British Columbia Government for seizing their children in order to give them blood transfusions. The parents claimed the procedure violated their religious beliefs, while the Government claimed it was medically necessary. The parents, however, in turn claimed that their constitutional rights were violated when the Government authorized the transfusions. The surviving children were returned to their parents' custody after the procedure.

In April 2007 a Sikh law student and the Canadian Human Rights Commission reached a settlement with the national rail carrier that permits Sikhs to wear kirpans (ceremonial daggers) on trains. The student was twice prohibited in September and October 2005 from riding on national rail carrier trains with a kirpan. Railway company officials, responding to another passenger's complaint and referring to its baggage policy that bans weapons, required that the Sikh passenger disembark, enforcing a company policy that makes no exceptions for religious symbols. A spokesperson stated that under the new policy, kirpans may only be worn by Sikhs, cannot be visible to other passengers, and must be sheathed at all times.

In March 2007 Quebec election officials ruled that voters in the provincial elections would be required to show their faces to polling workers before casting votes. Some critics opposed the measure and threatened to wear masks to the polling places in protest. Muslim community leaders maintained that they never asked for special treatment for Muslim women who wear niqab (veils that cover a woman's entire face) in public and that women routinely show their faces as necessary and appropriate. An official from the Council on American-Islamic Relations Canada alleged that the controversy was indicative of a growing hostility toward Muslims in the province.

In 2006 the police concluded their investigation of the polygamous community of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS), as a result of allegations of child abuse and statutory rape. The report's findings, however, had not been released by the end of the reporting period. The FLDS openly practices polygamy, a criminal offense according to the criminal code. British Columbia attorneys have generally declared that the statute violates the Charter of Freedoms and is unenforceable as a restriction on the practice of religion. At the end of the period covered by this report, a complaint by former FLDS members alleging denial of human rights was pending before the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal. The Government issued deportation orders for three foreign women, allegedly married to a former FLDS bishop, on the grounds of illegal extended residence in the country. The women alleged that the Government's refusal to grant residency based on their claimed marriage to a Canadian citizen constituted religious persecution. Citizenship and Immigration Canada denied their petition for humanitarian and compassionate parole, and the women filed appeals in court, still pending at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The B'nai Brith Canada League for Human Rights received 935 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2006, a 12.8 percent increase compared to 2005. The League noted that incidents had jumped more than four-fold since 1997. The highest num-

ber of reports came from Ontario Province (569 incidents, 445 of which took place in the Greater Toronto area), followed by Quebec Province (226 incidents, 215 of which took place in Montreal); approximately 80 percent of the Jewish population resided in these two provinces. A large spike in incidents occurred in July and August 2006 during the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. The majority of synagogue attacks took place in Quebec and Manitoba. The 935 reports included 588 cases of harassment, 317 cases of vandalism, and 30 cases of violence. Of these, 167 cases involved attacks on synagogues, Jewish homes, or communal buildings. Jewish students reported 54 cases of anti-Semitic incidents that occurred on campus, and another 48 involved school settings. The B'nai Brith League also noted a continued increase in web-based hate, with 253 reports compared to 164 cases in 2005.

On June 29, 2007, for the third time in 3 months, a Jewish cemetery in Ottawa was desecrated. According to reports, grave markers were uprooted and demolished and the watering system rendered useless. In April 2007 grave markers were also knocked over and anti-Semitic graffiti was painted on a cemetery wall. Police alleged that the incidents were related.

In April 2007 Montreal authorities charged two men for arson, uttering death threats, and possessing arson materials in connection with two incidents against the Jewish community. In April and September 2006, the men exploded a small bomb in front of a Jewish Community Center and hurled a firebomb at the front door of an Orthodox Jewish School. No one was injured in either attack.

Also in April 2007 a synagogue in British Columbia was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti on Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the British Columbia Hate Crimes Unit were investigating the attack as a hate crime.

In March 2007 a man wearing clothing and items representative of neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups was arrested after breaking a window at Toronto's Chabad Midtown Jewish Community Center. Authorities were treating the incident as a hate crime.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Toronto, Ontario Police Service 2006 Hate/Bias Crime Statistical Report counted 47 crimes based on religion, or 29 percent of the year's hate/bias crimes. The Jewish community comprises 4 percent of Toronto's population but was the target of 60 percent of the religious-based hate/bias crimes. Muslims comprise 7 percent of Toronto's population and were the target of 34 percent of the religious-based incidents. The Christian and Sikh communities were each the target of one crime.

On May 8, 2007, a man allegedly stabbed a young man at a mosque in Toronto because the victim refused to pray. The aggressor was charged with attempted murder.

In Quebec two separate incidents involving young girls wearing hijabs (headscarfs worn by Muslim women) at sporting events sparked a national outcry over the province's policy of reasonable accommodation. In April 2007 five Muslim girls were barred from participating in a Tae Kwon Do tournament due to a ban on head coverings for safety reasons. In February 2007 a young Muslim girl was ejected from a soccer game for wearing a hijab, which violated a Quebec Soccer Association safety rule. The referee claimed the hijab increased the risk of injury during play. In both cases the girls claimed the rules were being enforced without regard for religious considerations.

In March 2007 Toronto police investigated a probable hate crime directed against senior members of a moderate Islamic association. An unidentified caller threatened to harm the senior members of the Muslim Canadian Congress for "smearing" Islam. In the past the Muslim Canadian Congress has blamed other Muslim groups in the country of attempting to politicize Islam.

In January 2007 an elected town council in rural Quebec adopted a controversial code of conduct for immigrants. The code included provisions against the stoning or burning of women as well as provisions seemingly directed against Muslims and other immigrant groups. The code sparked a firestorm of media interest and public discourse on the subject of reasonable accommodation and was derided by some commentators as being anti-immigrant and insulting to religious minorities.

In January 2007 an Islamic school in the Montreal area was vandalized. Multiple windows were smashed and a school bus was ransacked.

In September 2006 an arsonist set fire to an Islamic school in Ottawa. No injuries were reported, but the school sustained damaged to its exterior and roof. Since the

perpetrator(s) did not leave behind any message or graffiti, the police undertook an arson probe rather than a hate crime investigation; the Council on American-Islamic Relations Canada urged the police to treat it is a hate crime. In Winnipeg, a mosque was spray painted with profanities and swastikas. Police were conducting an investigation.

During the reporting period, approximately 35 acts of vandalism against Christian churches and cemeteries were identified in the media. In December 2006 vandals spray painted anti-Christian slurs on the walls of a Catholic Church in London, Ontario. Also in December, vandals scattered vestments and knocked over sacred objects in a Catholic Church in Welland, Ontario.

SECTION IV. U.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 respected this right in practice.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 15 million. According to the most recent census (2002), 70 percent of the population over age 14 identify themselves as Roman Catholic, and 15.1 percent as evangelicals. In the census, the term "evangelical" referred 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. Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed Evangelical, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist churches are also present.

Other affiliations recorded in the 2002 census are Jehovah's Witnesses (119,455 persons), Mormons (103,735), Jews (14,976), Orthodox Christians (6,959), and Muslims (2,894). Of those surveyed, all other religions total 493,147 persons, or 4.4 percent, and atheists and those "indifferent" regarding religion constitute approximately 8.3 percent (931,990). The Baha'i were not mentioned in the census, but adherents estimate the number of practitioners at 6,000. There is also a small Buddhist population as well as a very small number of Unification Church members.

Indigenous people make up 5 percent (780,000) of the population. Of this group, 65 percent identify themselves as Catholic, 29 percent as evangelicals, and 6 percent as "other." Mapuche communities, constituting 87 percent of indigenous citizens, continue to respect traditional religious leaders (Longkos and Machis), and anecdotal information indicates a high degree of syncretism in worship and traditional healing practices.

Members of the largest religious groups (Catholic, Pentecostal and other evangelical churches) are numerous in the capital and are also found in other regions of the country. Jewish communities are located in Santiago, Valparaiso, Viña del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepción, and Iquique (although there is no synagogue in Iquique). Mosques are located in Santiago and Iquique, with a third under construction in Coquimbo.

Foreign missionaries operate freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Church and state are officially separate. The 1999 law on religion includes a clause that prohibits religious discrimination; however,

the Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status and occasionally receives preferential treatment. Government officials attend Catholic events and also major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies.

In addition to Christmas and Good Friday, four Catholic holy days are celebrated as national holidays: the Feast of the Virgin of Carmen, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

The law allows any religious group to apply for legal public right status (comprehensive religious nonprofit status). The Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registration petition, although it may object to the petition within 90 days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites for registration have not been satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections raised by the Ministry or challenge the Ministry in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the state cannot dissolve it by decree. The semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review; however, no organization that has registered under the 1999 law has subsequently been deregistered.

In addition the law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and by-laws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. They may establish affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate corporations.

Seventy-five religious organizations registered under the 1999 law and gained legal public right status during the period covered by this report, bringing the total to 1,143 religious groups and related organizations registered. This number includes the Catholic Church, Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, a wide range of Protestant churches (evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, and Seventh-day Adventist), Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, several Buddhist temples, Jewish congregations, and mosques.

Schools are required to offer religious education twice a week through middle school; participation is optional (with parental waiver). Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Catholic. Teaching the creed requested by parents is mandatory; however, enforcement is sometimes lax, and religious education in faiths other than Catholicism is often provided privately through Sunday schools and at other venues. Local school administrations decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. Although the Ministry of Education has approved curriculums for 14 other denominations, 92 percent of public schools and 81 percent of private schools offered instruction based only on the Catholic faith.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The 1999 law on religion grants other religions and denominations the same right that the Catholic Church possesses to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Hospital regulations continue specifically to permit Catholic chaplains in hospitals, and if requested by a patient, to provide access to chaplains and lay practitioners of other religions. There were 35 Catholic chapels, 40 paid Catholic chaplains, 25 volunteer Catholic chaplains, and 1,200 religious or lay volunteers authorized to conduct Catholic religious activities in the prison system. There were 9 paid evangelical Christian chaplain positions at the national level, 88 volunteer chaplains, and over 1,200 evangelical Christian volunteers representing 82 evangelical denominations conducting religious activities in the prison system. Non-Catholic pastors reported that their access to prisons and hospitals continued to improve over the period covered by this report.

The celebration of a Catholic Mass frequently marks official and public events. If the event is of a military nature, all members of the participating units are obliged to attend. The armed forces unofficially integrated a number of Protestant and evangelical Christian chaplains but continued to block efforts by non-Christian religious groups to provide military chaplains. Military regulations implementing the 1999 law were under discussion but had not been promulgated. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Catholic Church is considered beneficial to a military career; in the Navy it is allegedly almost a requirement for advancement to the highest posts.

In 2005 the Government denied full religious nonprofit status to the Unification Church, which continued to operate and worship under a more limited nonprofit organization status during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were several reports of anti-Semitic incidents, including spray-painted graffiti of swastikas and derogatory comments directed at Jewish individuals and institutions. Stores with Jewish proprietors in Chillán were painted with swastikas; anti-Semitic reading material was placed in the vicinity of a Jewish home for the elderly; anti-Semitic messages were sent to the Santiago office of a Jewish organization; and the Sephardic Web site was hacked and defaced. In addition street gangs identifying themselves as neo-Nazis or "skinheads" and often utilizing swastikas and other anti-Semitic symbols were involved in violence against non-Jewish victims in Santiago and other urban areas. There were no reports that these groups were involved in gang-related violence directed at the Jewish community.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.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 range of religious leaders, including Santiago's Catholic Archbishop and key representatives of evangelical and Jewish organizations. The Embassy also continued to maintain informal contact with representatives and leaders of several other religious groups.

COLOMBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected 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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Terrorist organizations, especially the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), killed, kidnapped, and extorted religious leaders and practitioners, inhibiting free religious expression. Terrorist organizations generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political rather than religious reasons. The National Liberation Army (ELN) continued threatening members of religious organizations but generally adhered to its agreement to cease killing religious leaders. Paramilitary organizations, including the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), also targeted representatives and members of religious organizations. Some indigenous leaders reportedly were intolerant of nonsyncretic forms of worship.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 41.2 million. The Government does not keep official statistics on religious affiliation, and religious leaders cited different numbers. According to the Colombian Evangelical Council (CEDECOL), for example, approximately 12 percent of the population was Protestant, while the Catholic Bishops' Conference estimated that 90 percent of the population was Catholic. A March 22, 2007, article in the daily newspaper *El Tiempo* said that 80 percent of the population was Catholic (with the footnote that not all are active practitioners), 13.5 percent belonged to non-Catholic forms of Christianity, 2 percent were agnostic, and the remaining 4.5 percent belonged to other religious groups, such as Islam and Judaism. The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Methodist Church had 261,000, and 1,500 members respectively. The Anglican Church and the Presbyterian Church had approximately 10,000 mem-

bers each. Other Protestant and Evangelical Churches had an estimated 5 million followers. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) claimed less than 1,000 members. Other religious groups with a significant number of adherents included Judaism, estimated at between 7,000 and 8,000 families, Islam, with an estimated 10,000 followers, animism, and various syncretic belief systems.

Adherents of some religious groups are concentrated in specific geographical regions. For example, the vast majority of practitioners of syncretic beliefs that blend Catholicism with elements of African animism are Afro-Colombian residents in the western department of Choco. Jews are concentrated in major cities, Muslims on the Caribbean coast, and adherents of indigenous animistic religions in remote, rural areas. A small Taoist commune exists in a mountainous region of Santander Department.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The following Christian holy days are national holidays: Epiphany, Saint Joseph Day, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the Ascension, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart Day, Saints Peter and Paul Day, Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

The Constitution states that there is no official church or religion but 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 Catholicism, which was the official religion until the adoption of the 1991 Constitution. A 1973 concordat between the Vatican and the Government remains in effect, although some of its articles are 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 (MOIJ) 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 MOIJ may reject requests that do not comply fully with established requirements or that violate fundamental constitutional rights. Some non-Catholic religious leaders complained that their applications were unnecessarily delayed and that their petitions for recognition as a legal entity were denied for trivial reasons. They stated that for this reason, many non-Catholic religious groups chose not to apply for legal recognition and instead operated as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or as informal religious entities.

Since 1995 the MOIJ has approved 1,170 applications for special public recognition as a religious entity; an estimated 90 percent of the approvals were for evangelical churches. An April 2, 2007, article in *El Tiempo* quoted Bogotá's mayor as stating that there were now 700 non-Catholic places of worship in the capital city, compared to 450 Catholic churches. According to the MOIJ, 1,775 applications failed to meet constitutionally established requirements and thus were not approved. 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 asked the Government to sponsor legislation establishing less exacting standards for special public recognition, formally codifying religious freedoms provided in the Constitution, and creating a special office for religious affairs. Although the MOIJ has statutory authority over recognizing religious entities, there is no Government agency to monitor or enforce laws governing religious freedom.

Accession to a 1997 public law agreement between the state and non-Catholic religious groups is required for such organizations to minister to their adherents in public institutions such as hospitals or prisons, provide chaplaincy services and religious instruction in public schools, and perform marriages recognized by the state. When deciding whether to grant accession to the 1997 agreement, the Government considers a religious group'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. At the end of the period covered by this report, 13 non-Catholic churches had been granted accession. No non-Christian religious group was a signatory to the 1997 public law agreement. Some prominent non-Christian religious groups, such as the Jewish community, sought not to accede to the 1997 public law, declaring that the agreement was designed for Protestant groups. Many churches that are signatories reported that some local authorities failed to comply with the accord.

The Ministry of Foreign Relations issues visas to foreign missionaries and religious administrators of the denominations that have received special public recognition. Foreign missionaries are required to possess a special visa, valid up to 2 years. Applicants must have a certificate from the MOIJ confirming that the religion is registered with the Ministry or a certificate issued by the Catholic archdioceses. Alternatively, they may produce a certificate issued by the religious organization itself confirming the applicant's membership and his mission in the country as well as a letter issued by a legal representative of the religious organization stating that the organization accepts full financial responsibility for the expenses of the applicant and his family, including his return to the country of origin or last country of residence. In both cases, applicants must explain the purpose of the proposed sojourn and provide proof of economic means. The Government generally permits missionaries to proselytize among the indigenous population, provided that the indigenous group welcomes proselytization and visitors do not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands. A recent Supreme Court case stipulated that no group may force religious conversion on members of indigenous communities. Evangelical leaders said this decision was interpreted by local authorities as prohibiting proselytizing on indigenous lands. They claimed that local authorities forcefully removed missionaries from indigenous areas.

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. Religious groups that have not acceded to the public law agreement may establish their own schools, provided they comply with Ministry of Education requirements. For example, the Jewish community operates its own schools. The Catholic Church has an agreement with the Government to provide education in rural areas that have no state-operated schools. These schools are tax-exempt. Leaders of non-Catholic religious groups claimed that local authorities in many municipalities did not grant their schools the same tax-exempt status enjoyed by the Catholic schools. These leaders also claimed that a decree by the Minister of Education to include education about religion in public schools was interpreted in many municipalities as a mandate to teach about Catholicism only, while offering no alternative instruction to students of other religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Although the 1991 Constitution mandates the separation of church and state, the 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. However, Muslim and Protestant leaders claimed they faced difficulties in gaining military chaplain positions and access to prisoners. The state recognizes as legally binding only those religious marriages celebrated by the Catholic Church and the 13 non-Catholic religious organizations that are signatories to the 1997 public law agreement, as well as religious groups with an associated status to one of those signatories. Members of religious groups that are not signatories to the agreement must marry in a civil ceremony in order for the state to recognize the marriage. Some signatories to the agreement complained of discrimination at the local level, such as refusal by municipal authorities to recognize marriages performed by these groups. In addition, CEDECOL claimed that two state-operated television channels refused to allow evangelical groups to buy or receive airtime, while the Catholic Church received 2 minutes daily without cost.

All legally recognized churches, seminaries, monasteries, and convents are exempt from national and local taxes and customs duties. However, some non-Catholic religious groups reported that municipal governments required them to pay property and other local taxes on their places of worship and schools. The Colombian Evangelical Council claimed this tax-free status was not respected in practice. According to an April 2006 article in the daily newspaper *El Espectador*, the Treasury Department issued a decree requiring all non-Catholic places of worship to pay a tax of

4 percent on all tithes, offerings, and charitable contributions they received. According to CEDECOL, non-Catholic missionaries and religious leaders must also pay a tax of 35 percent on all financial assistance received from outside the country.

In October 2006 the Bogotá municipal government passed a city planning ordinance that restricted the number of churches in residential areas and placed stringent building codes on church facilities. CEDECOL claimed that if this ordinance is implemented in late 2007, it could result in the closure of 70 percent of the Protestant churches in the capital. Evangelical, Muslim, and Anglican leaders complained that the plan showed favoritism toward Catholicism, since many Catholic churches were historic monuments in central locations and were thus exempt from the proposal's requirements.

There were no developments in the case against the leaders of a small Taoist commune in Santander Department, who were accused of multiple killings, rape, extortion, kidnapping, and aiding paramilitary organizations from December 1998 to mid-2004.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

There were isolated reports of anti-Semitism, including inflammatory statements in the media during the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in the summer of 2006. On August 6, 2006, anti-Semitic graffiti was painted in the area around the Israeli Embassy in Bogotá.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

Religious leaders and practitioners were the targets of threats and kidnappings by guerrilla groups and former paramilitaries. The FARC, the AUC, and the ELN generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political or financial rather than religious reasons. These groups were responsible for the majority of such attacks and threats, killing, kidnapping, extorting, and inhibiting free religious expression. The Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office continued to investigate the killings in past years of 14 members of the clergy believed to have been slain because they were outspoken critics of terrorist organizations.

The Presidential Program for Human Rights reported that nearly all killings of priests by terrorist groups could be attributed to leftist guerrillas, particularly the FARC. In the period since January 1, 2006, a human rights organization affiliated with the Mennonite church, Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta (or Justapaz), registered 63 death threats from the FARC against members of religious communities. During the same period, Justapaz reported 47 such threats from the AUC. The same report indicated that the FARC was responsible for eight killings of religious leaders. Former paramilitaries were responsible for six such killings, and the ELN was responsible for one. In addition, the group documented 10 attempted killings, 8 of which were attributable to former paramilitaries. Justapaz recorded 103 religious community members as victims of forced displacement, 68 of which they attributed to former paramilitaries. Most of the remaining forced displacements were attributed to the FARC. The group documented the cases of six religious community members who were victims of torture, three of which they attributed to former paramilitaries.

Since July 1, 2004, according to the Catholic Bishops' Conference, terrorist groups have killed seven priests. Catholic and Protestant church leaders stated that killings of religious leaders in rural communities were generally underreported because of the communities' isolation and fear of retribution. Religious leaders generally chose not to seek Government protection because of their pacifist beliefs and fear of retribution from terrorist groups. Justapaz and CEDECOL claimed that former paramilitaries and guerrillas equally committed violence against evangelical church leaders.

According to a March 11, 2007, article in *El Tiempo*, a Catholic priest, Yimy Torres, and a seminary student, Ramiro Prieto, were killed in their home in South Bogotá. Both were found bound with plastic bags tied over their heads and died of asphyxiation. Members of Torres' church commented that his sermons were very frank about problems in the country and this put him in danger. He reportedly told a member of his congregation that he had been threatened. The investigation by the Government was in the preliminary stages.

There was no information regarding the March 2006 killing of evangelical pastor Oscar Munoz Perea in Buenaventura, Valle de Cauca Department. Witnesses identified the killers as belonging to the AUC.

In September 2005 authorities captured FARC intelligence operative Omar Segundo Contreras Chamorro in Sucre Department. Contreras was wanted for his participation in the 2002 killing of Catholic priest Jose Luis Cardenas Fernandez. At the end of the period covered by this report, the trial was still in the preliminary investigative stage.

The body of Catholic priest Cesar Dario Pena had not been recovered at the end of the period covered by this report. In 2004 the FARC kidnapped him and in 2005 killed him, according to a captured FARC leader.

There were no developments regarding the 2005 killing of Catholic priest Jesus Adrian Sanchez in Tolima Department. According to the Catholic Bishops' Conference, the FARC killed Sanchez for his activism against the group's recruitment of child soldiers.

According to the Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America, in January 2006 the Reverend Milton Mejia and Mauricio Avilez of the Ecumenical Church Network of Colombia were threatened with death, apparently by former paramilitary personnel, because of their work defending the democratic and constitutional rights of victims of violence.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference reported that 64 Catholic churches were seriously damaged or destroyed in the last decade. Catholic churches generally were not attacked intentionally, but were often affected by nearby guerrilla attacks.

According to the Christian Union Movement, advances by Government security forces against the FARC resulted in the reopening of approximately 350 of the more than 450 evangelical churches closed since 2002. All religious groups reported that due to threats from guerrillas or former paramilitaries, many religious authorities were forced to refrain from publicly discussing the country's internal conflict. Illegal armed groups, especially the FARC, threatened or attacked religious officials for opposing the forced recruitment of minors, promoting human rights, assisting internally displaced persons, and discouraging coca cultivation. The Catholic Bishops' Conference also reported that former paramilitaries and guerrillas issued death threats against rural priests who spoke out against them. In response to such threats, some religious leaders relocated to other communities.

Guerrillas or former paramilitaries harassed some indigenous groups that practiced animistic or syncretic 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The Catholic Church and some evangelical churches reported that some indigenous leaders were intolerant of nonsyncretic forms of worship. According to CEDECOL, indigenous groups set fire to some Christian missionary churches on or near indigenous lands while people were inside the structures.

A number of faith-based nongovernmental organizations promoted human rights, social and economic development, and a negotiated settlement to the country's armed conflict. The most influential of these organizations were either affiliated with the Catholic Church or founded by Church officials. The Catholic Church continued to be the only institutional presence in many rural areas and conducted 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 maintained regular communication with representatives of the Catholic Church and other religious groups.

COSTA RICA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 4.3 million, according to the National Institute of Census and Statistics. The most recent nationwide survey of religion, conducted in 2006 by the University of Costa Rica, found that 47.2 percent of the population identify themselves as practicing Roman Catholics, 27.3 percent consider themselves nonpracticing Roman Catholics, 12.8 percent state they are evangelical Protestants, 9.2 percent report that they do not have a religion, and 3.3 percent declare that they belong to "another religion."

Apart from the dominant Catholic religion, there are several other religious groups in the country. Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Baptist, and other Protestant groups have significant membership. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has a temple in San Jose that served as a regional worship center for Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Although they represent less than 1 percent of the population, Jehovah's Witnesses have a strong presence on the Caribbean coast. Seventh-day Adventists operate a university that attracts students from throughout the Caribbean Basin. The Unification Church maintains its continental headquarters for Latin America in San Jose. Non-Christian religious groups, including followers of Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Hare Krishna, Scientology, Tenrikyo, and the Baha'i Faith, claim membership throughout the country, with the majority of worshippers residing in the Central Valley (the area of the capital). While there is no general correlation between religion and ethnicity, indigenous peoples are more likely to practice animism than other religions.

Foreign missionaries and clergy of all denominations work and proselytize freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution provides the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and the Government generally observed and enforced this provision. In the event of a violation of religious freedom, a victim may file a lawsuit with the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court. A victim may also file a motion before the Constitutional Chamber to have a statute or regulation declared unconstitutional. Additionally, a victim may appeal to the Government's administrative court for permission to sue the Government for alleged discriminatory acts. Laws are generally applied and enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

While the Constitution establishes Catholicism as the state religion and requires that the state contribute to its maintenance, it also prohibits the state from impeding the free exercise of other religions that do not impugn universal morality or proper behavior. The Constitutional Chamber rejected periodic challenges to the state religion article of the Constitution. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for managing the Government's relationship with the Catholic Church and other religious groups.

The law allows for the Government to provide land to the Catholic Church. This practice was established in part to restore the Church's land seized by the Government during the 19th century. Land conveyance takes two forms: right of development grants, with ownership retained by the state, and outright title grants, a method commonly used to provide land for the construction of local churches. These methods did 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 but rather by specific legislative action once or twice per year.

Besides notaries public, only officials of the Catholic Church can perform marriages that are automatically recognized by the state. Other religious groups can perform wedding ceremonies, but the marriage must then be legalized via a civil union. Couples may also choose to have only a civil ceremony.

Various Christian holy days are considered national holidays, including Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Our Lady of Los Angeles (August 2). Christmas is also

a national holiday. However, if an individual wishes to observe another holy day, the labor code provides the necessary flexibility for that observance upon the employer's approval.

The Government does not require religious groups to register, nor does it inhibit the establishment of religious groups through taxation or special licensing requirements. Such groups may incorporate to acquire legal status and must have a minimum of 12 members to do so. As stipulated in the law governing associations, religious groups must register to be eligible for residence permits for their missionaries and employees and to petition for legal recognition of religious holidays. Also, religious groups, as any other association, must register with the Public Registry of the Justice Department if they are involved in any type of fundraising activity. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were 3,000 registered religious associations representing 200 religious groups.

In August 2006 a new immigration law went into effect that changed certain procedures for missionaries and resident religious workers seeking residency. The exact operating procedures and bylaws were not yet available at the time of this report, as the bill providing for implementation was still to be considered at the national legislature; however, certain interim guidelines have been developed. Under these guidelines, missionaries must apply for a residency permit in their country of origin and can no longer enter as tourists and then change status. The new law also stipulates that all foreign missionaries must be a part of a religious organization accredited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion. Applications by foreign missionaries seeking permission to work are studied on a case-by-case basis. They may be given a temporary permit that is granted for a term of at least 90 days but not more than 2 years at the discretion of the General Directorate of Immigration. Foreign missionaries already working in the country must still apply for an annually renewable temporary residence permit. The General Directorate of Immigration office grants this status.

In September 2006 the Ministry of Security, which oversees the General Directorate of Immigration, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference signed an agreement that would allow the Catholic Bishops' Conference to present applications for visas or residency for Church personnel directly to Immigration and so avoid the lengthy delays for these services. This allows for Catholic priests, nuns, and other religious personnel to apply for the religious visas once they arrive in the country, rather than in the country of origin.

The Government, through the Ministry of Public Education (MEP), provides subsidies to Catholic schools, although the national legislature was considering some proposed laws to shift part of this subsidy to the students, rather than to the schools. These projects have met resistance and several challenges in the Constitutional Court, yet to be decided.

Catholic religious instruction is provided in the public schools; however, it is not mandatory. Students may obtain exemptions from this instruction with the permission of their parents, and the Ministry of Education estimates that 10 percent of students choose this option. The school director, the student's parents, and the student's teacher must agree on an alternative course of instruction for the exempted student during instruction time. Religious education teachers in public schools must be certified by the Catholic Bishops' Conference, which does not certify teachers from other religious groups.

According to the education code, the Catholic Church has the sole authority to select teachers of religion for the public school system. The Church maintained an office within the Ministry of Education expressly for this function. According to the Department of Religious Education, only Catholic university graduates are eligible to teach religion in public school.

In January 2007 the Supreme Court rejected an argument from an individual plaintiff that the law requiring religious education teachers in public schools to be certified by the Catholic Church was contrary to the Constitution's protection of work as an individual right.

Private schools are free to offer any religious instruction they chose. Parents do not have the option of homeschooling their children.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Religious organizations must submit applications to establish a place of worship to the local municipality and must comply with safety and noise regulations as established by the general health law. In the past, several evangelical churches were closed for alleged noise violations. At the end of the period covered by this report, the President's Office was working with the Health and the Housing Ministries to

draft regulations regarding the building codes for places of worship that would apply to all places of worship, regardless of their religious affiliation. The Human Rights Ombudsman reported that adequate regulations were already in place but stated that the Government must work on equitable enforcement of the regulations so as not to appear to favor any particular religion.

Despite the official status of the Catholic Church, the Constitution prohibits clergymen or secular individuals from engaging in political propaganda motivated by religion. There is no prohibition on clergymen or other religious individuals serving in political office; however, the Constitution establishes that the president, vice president, cabinet members, and Supreme Court justices may not be members of the clergy.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

In July 2006 the director of the largest public hospital gave evangelical pastors the right to enter the hospital and minister to their followers. This action came after a legislator accused the hospital of discrimination since only Catholic priests had been allowed entry to minister previously.

SECTION IV. U.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 had regular contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Director of Religion. The Embassy also maintained contact with the Catholic archbishop and dioceses to discuss specific issues.

CUBA

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice the Government continued to place restrictions on freedom of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period, which included the transmission of authority from Fidel Castro to his brother Raul Castro as a result of the former's incapacitation. Overall human rights conditions remained poor. Some religious figures who criticized the Government's totalitarian system in sermons were subjected to intense harassment. In general, unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference, harassment, and repression. The Government maintained its policy of permitting apolitical religious activity to take place in Government-approved sites. However, state security forces continued to subject to surveillance citizens worshipping in officially sanctioned churches, and the Government continued its efforts to maintain a strong degree of control over religion. In 2005 the Government implemented new regulations that restricted the operation of house churches but eased its policy on issuing work permits to foreign clergy.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Visiting U.S. Members of Congress raised human rights in a general way with the Government and were rebuffed. Overall the Government refused to discuss human rights or religious freedom with the U.S. Government, although it claimed to be an international model of respect for human rights. The U.S. Government continued to urge international pressure on the Government to cease its repressive practices. In Havana, officers assigned to the U.S. Interests Section engaged a broad range of religious leaders in discourse and on many occasions invited them to representational events.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 68,888 square miles and a population of 11.2 million. There is no independent authoritative source on the size or composition of religious institutions and their membership. According to the U.S.-based Puebla Institute, 40 to 45 percent of the population identify themselves, at least nominally, with the Catholic Church. Some sources estimated that as much as 70 percent of the population practices Santeria, which has its roots in West African traditional religions.

The Baptists, represented in four different conventions, were possibly the largest Protestant denomination, followed closely by the Pentecostal churches, particularly the Assemblies of God. In March 2006 membership in the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) increased to 23 groups when World Wide Missions, a Pentecostal church, joined. Other members include Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Methodist groups, but not the Catholic Church. The CCC is structured into five "zones" across the island and, according to the CCC's leadership, represented approximately 100,000 Christians. Most CCC members are officially recognized by the state, although several, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church, lacked legal status and were recognized through their membership in the CCC. Other officially recognized groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the small Jewish and Muslim communities, did not belong to the CCC.

Catholic Church officials estimated that 10 percent of baptized Catholics attend Mass regularly. Membership in Protestant churches increased and was estimated at 530,000 persons. No statistics on Pentecostal membership are available, but members of the church indicated that membership has risen sharply in recent years. Jehovah's Witnesses claim more than 86,000 active members, and the Seventh-day Adventists report 30,000 persons. There are 22,000 Anglicans, and 14,000 Presbyterians. Methodists claim that since 1999 their clergy has grown from 330 to 1,100, and overall membership is now 18,000. The Jewish community has 1,200 members, approximately half residing in Havana. The Muslim population was estimated at no less than 300. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has an estimated 15 members.

There are 344 Catholic priests, 61 permanent deacons, and 628 religious sisters in the country, many fewer than the total prior to 1960. These numbers remained essentially constant during the reporting period. Fewer than half of all Catholic "religious" priests, as opposed to "diocesan" priests, are of Cuban origin; most of the others were from Spain or Mexico. Most new arrivals replaced retiring priests or those whose time of service in the country had ended. The replacements came from the same religious orders.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country through registered churches. Visits by religious figures, including that of Rabbi Arthur Schneier, President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, are handled by the Religious Affairs Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In November 2006 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Havana's Jewish Community, Rabbi Schneier, accompanied by Seton Hall University President Monsignor Robert Sheeran, visited Havana.

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 placed 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 officially favor any particular religion or church, but it appears to be most tolerant of those churches that maintained 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 conduct their activities, demonstrate their funding for these activities, and obtain certification from the Registry of Associations that they are not duplicating the activities of a previously registered organization. Registration allows church officials to obtain official permission to travel abroad and receive foreign visitors, accept imported religious literature through the CCC, and meet in officially recognized places of worship. Conversely, members of unregistered religious groups must request exit permits on an individual basis, obtain religious materials through extralegal means, and risk closure of their technically illegal meeting places. In March 2007 Yoruba

and other Santeria religious groups, Greek and Russian Orthodox, some Baptist, Buddhist, and Islamic religious groups were granted full legal recognition.

The Government tolerates some religions, such as the Baha'i Faith and a small group of Mormons, that were relatively new to the country. Proselytizing in general is permitted on a selective basis. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses were allowed to proselytize quietly door-to-door and generally were not subject to overt Government harassment; however, there continued to be reports of discrimination in schools. A Protestant pastor reported that state security warned him not to proselytize in a poor Havana neighborhood or his actions would be interpreted as political agitation.

Religious literature and materials must be imported through a registered religious group and can be distributed only to officially recognized religious groups. The CCC controls distribution of Bibles to its members and to other officially recognized denominations. On some occasions, churches or church groups distributed Bibles without Government permission and without incident.

Since 1992 the Communist Party has admitted as members persons who openly declared their religious faith; however, such persons rarely ascended to senior positions in the Government.

The Government does not permit religious education in public schools nor the operation of private schools of any kind, including religious schools, although several international schools in Havana are given considerable leeway in setting their curricula. The Government allows the Catholic Church and the Havana Jewish community center to administer small charities and to offer religious education classes and self-improvement courses on subjects such as computers and foreign languages.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government's main interaction with religious denominations is through the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party. The Office is intended to encourage dialogue between churches and the Government, but many religious figures believed that its real role is to assert the Government's power. The Ministry of Interior, through its state security apparatus, continues to engage in efforts to control and monitor the country's religious institutions, including surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of religious professionals and laypersons. In 2004 an independent journalist interviewed a former Ministry of Interior official who reported widespread Government infiltration of religious organizations, especially targeting Afro-Caribbean religious groups due to their high rates of participation and grassroots threat to the Government.

The law allows for the construction of new churches once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government rarely authorized construction permits, forcing many churches to resort to expanding existing houses of worship. According to CCC President Rhode Gonzalez, none of the group's member churches or church confederations received Government permission to construct a new church building during the reporting period. However, the CCC President said many churches were expanded during this period. The process of obtaining a permit for an expansion or repair project and purchasing construction materials from Government outlets remained lengthy and expensive.

Most registered religious groups are able to hold services in private homes. The numbers have increased in recent years, and many religious leaders attributed this to the Government's refusal to authorize the construction of new churches. In September 2005 the Government implemented a controversial directive that many religious groups viewed as restricting the operation of house churches. Directive 43 and Resolution 46 require house church operators to register with the Government, thus "legalizing" their existence. To register a house church, an operator must meet several requirements, some of which infringe on religious freedom: the house church cannot host more than three meetings per week; it must not be located within 2 kilometers of another house church; and it may be open only between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. on workdays, and between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. on other days. The new regulations also state that the use of a sound system requires permission from neighbors and that no house church can operate in a multifamily residence.

The vast majority of house churches were unregistered and thus technically illegal. All religious groups complained that the registration process was arduous. House churches were difficult to quantify, but Christian Solidarity Worldwide estimated that there are at least 10,000 nationwide. According to a leading Baptist Church official, of the 1,500 Baptist house churches in the western region, no more than 20 had been "legalized" by the time the directive was issued in April 2005. Methodists claim 750 house churches.

Church officials from several denominations said that the Government had made the new regulations widely known but had not undertaken sweeping action to implement the new rules. Some Pentecostal church officials considered themselves sin-

gled out by the directive, and a Baptist church leader also judged it a threat. The Pentecostals said that, unlike members of other denominations who seldom meet in a house church more than once or twice a week, many Pentecostals attend such meetings three or four times a week. They also noted that Pentecostal church membership rose sharply in recent years. At least one Baptist church leader criticized the requirement that a house church not be located within 2 kilometers of another house church, arguing that the directive would be difficult to obey in a congested city.

The Government continued to allow foreign Catholic priests and religious workers into the country, generally to replace foreign priests and nuns who had died or whose residence permits had expired. Previously, the Government adhered to a policy of approving new applicants only to the extent that they replaced clergy who had departed. However, in June 2005 the Government eased this policy and granted work permits to several foreign priests and nuns who entered as nonreplacements. The Government also communicated to the Catholic Church that it would not allow priests who visited as tourists to be involved in active ministry. Non-Catholic religious groups reported that foreign clergy generally visited for short periods, not exceeding 6 months.

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 (CCCB) indicated that the Church has declined to register because registration would force it to cede control to the state regarding the content and format of church publications. The Government did not block the printing or distribution of Catholic magazines; however, the state impedes access to printing by making equipment costly or placing restrictions on its sale. Several Catholic dioceses and lay groups published magazines, including *Palabra Nueva* of the Havana Archdiocese and the free-thinking *Vitral* of the Pinar del Rio Diocese. However, in April 2007 *Vitral*'s editor announced that he was ceasing publication due to a lack of paper and ink. The *Vitral* editorial board also lost their Internet access at that time. The new Bishop of Pinar del Rio Diocese disputed the claim that *Vitral* was forced to close; however, without necessary supplies the magazine would not be able to continue production. *Vitral* resumed publication under new editorial management in June 2007.

Catholic priests and other clergy were able to deliver sermons without advance screening by Government censors, and some made pointed references to the totalitarian state. However, those who did were sometimes subjected to intense harassment. State security closely watched outspoken Santiago priest Jose Conrado Rodriguez Alegre, who has called attention to the country's human rights record, throughout the reporting period.

The Government generally did not allow the Catholic Church access to public media, but Church officials revealed in February 2006 that the Government had offered it the opportunity to broadcast a radio program on the FM band, via a small, low-power radio station. The Church rejected the offer because the transmitter and the proposed hour of use were "inconvenient." In April 2006 authorities allowed the Catholic bishops in Holguin and Bayamo to broadcast a 12-minute Holy Week radio message, which was the first such message in Holguin in 46 years. In 2007 an educational channel aired the Good Friday portion of the Pope's Easter "Via Crucis" and film footage of Easter Sunday was shown on the country's nightly TV news show.

In July 2006 Fidel Castro's incapacitation took him out of the public eye. There were no reports that acting leader Raul Castro met with senior Church officials during the reporting period. In April 2007 the Secretary General of the Cuban Bishops Conference, Monsignor Juan de Dios Hernandez Ruiz, issued a statement that the Church and the Government had "entered a process of better understanding."

The Jewish community had a modus vivendi with the regime that allowed the main synagogue and community center to function with the support of foreign charities based mostly in the United States and Canada. Jews were permitted to emigrate to Israel through a liaison office in the Canadian Embassy.

Religious officials were allowed to visit prisoners; however, prison officials sometimes refused visits to certain political prisoners. For a religious visit to take place, the prisoner had to submit a written request, and the prison director had to 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.

Churches found it exceedingly difficult to purchase computers, fax machines, photocopiers, and other equipment, since the Government required a special permit for such purchases. Government decisions were officially made on a case-by-case basis, but in practice very few churches received permits.

The Government controlled the Internet, and any group seeking legal access was subject to its controls. The Government denied Internet access to some religious groups that it deemed unreliable. Following a November 2005 meeting with Fidel Castro, the country's 13 bishops were allowed access at the CCCB's Havana headquarters; however, the clergy had only tightly restricted access at their offices.

Members of the Armed Forces do not attend religious services in uniform, probably to avoid possible reprimand by superiors.

Education is secular, and no religious educational institutions are allowed. Religious instruction in public schools is not permitted. Churches provided religious education classes to their members, as well as seminars to wider audiences. Catholic Church officials reported that the number of children attending catechism classes continued to drop, mostly because of other activities, usually scheduled by local school authorities. There were no reports of parents being restricted from teaching religion to their children.

Officials of various groups reported cases of religious persons experiencing discrimination because of ignorance or personal prejudice by a local official. Religious persons encountered 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. The Catholic Church decided to stop requesting permits for processions in areas where they historically have not been permitted. There were smaller, local processions throughout the provinces during the reporting period. In 2007 larger processions for Easter were permitted in Camaguey and Santa Clara provinces. Eight hundred youth participated in a special Easter observance just outside of Havana.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government monitored all religious groups, including registered and established institutions. The authorities also monitored church-run publications. Government harassment of private houses of worship continued.

The Ministry of the Interior continued to engage in efforts to control and monitor religious activities and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups, religious professionals, and laypersons. There were continued reports that local Communist Party and Government officials harassed Jehovah's Witnesses.

State security agents or their Communist militant proxies 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. In March 2007 Government-directed mobs physically prevented some wives from traveling to Havana for the Mass, although others evaded state security detection and were able to attend. At Santa Rita Church, state security officers sat near the spouses of political prisoners during Mass in an attempt to intimidate them. Many of the women belonged to the Ladies in White organization (joint winner of the European Parliament's 2006 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought). Many of the group members expressed concern about Government retaliation against them or their jailed husbands. The Government also impeded access by political prisoners' spouses to Mass at Santa Rita Church by scheduling phone calls and prisoner visits at inconvenient times.

In February 2006 prison authorities broke up a prayer group of more than 15 inmates at Havana's Combinado del Este prison. The Government continued to deny access to the country's prisons to international groups focused on fundamental rights, including religious rights.

The Government gave Santeria advantages and privileges not available to other religions, on the grounds that Santeria represented the country's culture. As a result, unlike other religious groups, Santeria is a regular feature of television programming and is given wide coverage in the media.

There were reports of discrimination against members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For the Adventists, Saturdays are days of observance and therefore their children do not participate in school activities. Some Adventist children were subjected to humiliation and maltreatment by school teachers for their nonattendance on Saturdays. According to reports, one child who was mistreated at school developed anxiety and depression and was diagnosed by a psychologist with "unfavorable development."

Denial of religious assistance to prisoners was not uncommon. At the end of the reporting period, human rights activist Diosdado Gonzalez Marrero remained unable to receive religious assistance. In the past year he submitted at least 67 written requests to prison authorities to allow for a Catholic priest to visit him at the Kilo

5½ prison facility in Pinar del Rio. Ministry of Interior officials denied having received such requests.

Jehovah's Witnesses are also subject to discrimination and harassment by the Government for refusing to serve in the military and pledging allegiance to the flag. On March 24, 2007, Ray Luciano Lopez Moreno was detained for 3 days before being taken to a civil court for refusing to fulfill the compulsory military service requirement. Lopez Moreno was sanctioned and fined by the 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

U.S. Government policy toward the country is to promote a rapid, peaceful transition to democracy and respect for human rights, including religious freedom, and the U.S. Government encourages the development of civil society, which includes the strengthening of religious institutions.

The U.S. Government was not granted access to the Government to be able to raise religious freedom or other human rights matters. In December 2006 a visiting Congressional Delegation raised human rights in a general way and was rebuffed. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana continued to maintain regular contact with the various religious leaders and communities and to support nongovernmental organization initiatives that aided religious groups. The U.S. Government regularly sought to facilitate travel to and from the country by religious persons as well as the delivery of donated material that in some cases was provided to religious institutions. As in the past, the U.S. Government continuously urged international pressure on the Government to cease its repressive practices, including religious discrimination and harassment.

DOMINICA

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

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 72,400. According to the 2001 population and housing census, approximately 61 percent of the population adhered to the Roman Catholic faith. Followers of evangelical churches represented 18 percent of the population, Seventh-day Adventists 6 percent, and Methodists 3.7 percent. Minority religious groups and denominations, whose members ranged in number from 1.6 percent to 0.2 percent of the population, included Rastafarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Anglicans, and Muslims. According to the census, 1.4 percent of the population belonged to "other" religious groups, including Baptist, Nazarene, Church of Christ, Brethren Christian, and the Baha'i Faith; 6 percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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.

The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

The Government requires all religious organizations to register. Organizations must register as nonprofit organizations with the Attorney General's office and also register their buildings through the Government registrar. Such recognition affects the religious group's nonprofit organization status, its ability to hold public meetings, and the work status of its missionaries. Any organization denied permission to register has the right to apply for judicial review.

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 teacher salaries at religiously affiliated schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, employed in their religious rituals, was illegal.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The Dominica Christian Council and the Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches conducted activities to promote peace, greater mutual understanding, and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

Although intolerance is gradually decreasing, Rastafarians complained that discrimination against their members still exists, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, has an area of 18,815 square miles and a population of 9.2 million. The largest religious denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christians (particularly Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a much smaller but generally growing presence. According to a population survey taken in 2006 by the Gallup Organization, the population is 39.8 percent Catholic (practicing), 29.1 percent Catholic (nonpracticing), and 18.2 percent evangelical Protestant. In the same study, 10.6 percent

state they have no religion. The Dominican Confederation of Evangelical Unity (CODUE) assert that evangelicals represent 16 to 20 percent of the population.

There are approximately 300 Jews, of whom very few are observant. Most live in Santo Domingo, which has a synagogue and a community leader but no ordained rabbi. There is a synagogue for the small Jewish community in Sosua. Both synagogues were led by the same individual.

Various Government sources estimate that there are between 5,000 and 10,000 Muslims, a figure that includes many foreign students. There is an active Sunni mosque in Santo Domingo, with approximately 300 regular worshippers. There is a small number of Buddhists and Hindus. Many Catholics practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santería), witchcraft (brujería), or voodoo (vodou), but because these practices are usually concealed, the number of adherents is unknown.

There are organized missionary groups in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution specifies that there is no state religion. The Government signed a concordat in 1954 with the Vatican, making Catholicism the official religion and extending to the Catholic Church special privileges not granted to other religious groups. These include the use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, such as rehabilitation of church facilities, and exoneration from all customs duties. The Cardinal has the rank of a military general officer, and there is a Catholic chapel at the presidential palace.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may request exonerations from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. This process can be lengthy; however, no requests for tax exoneration were denied during the period covered by this report. Evangelical Protestant leaders regularly urged the Government to provide their churches privileges equivalent to those granted to the Catholic Church. Catholic weddings are the only religious wedding ceremonies that the Government recognizes.

On July 11, 2006, the Ministerio Jesús es Sanidad y Vida Eterna (Jesus is Health and Life Eternal Ministries), an evangelical Christian organization, challenged the constitutionality of the concordat in place between the state and the Vatican before the Supreme Court of Justice. Twelve days later the Supreme Court solicited an advisory opinion from the Office of the Attorney General on the case, to which the Office of the Attorney General responded in August 2006 with a recommendation that the constitutional challenge be denied. At the end of the reporting period, the Supreme Court had not taken further action.

The law requires that the Bible be read in public schools, but the law was not enforced. Private schools are not obliged to include Bible reading among their activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy met with leaders of various religious communities, including those of minority groups.

ECUADOR

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 12.2 million (in 2001). The Catholic Episcopal Conference estimates that 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, with 35 percent of Catholics actively practicing. Although no scientific survey has been undertaken, the Episcopal Conference estimates that attendance at Mass increased slightly during the period of this report. Some groups, particularly indigenous people who live in the mountains, follow a syncretic form of Catholicism that combines indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often are venerated in ways similar to indigenous deities. In the Amazonian jungle region, Catholic practices are often combined with elements of shamanism.

The Evangelical Missionary Union estimates that there are 1 million Protestants. While Protestant conversions traditionally have been among the lower classes, there are growing numbers of professionals converting to Protestantism. Southern Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Presbyterians, and Pentecostals successfully find converts in different regions, particularly among indigenous people in the Sierra provinces of Chimborazo, Bolivar, Cotopaxi, Imbabura, and Pichincha, especially among persons who practiced syncretic religions, as well as in groups marginalized by society. Other popular evangelical groups include the Assembly of God in urban areas and the Church of the Word of God, which is growing rapidly in indigenous areas. In general, rural indigenous areas tend to be either entirely Catholic or entirely Protestant.

Hundreds of evangelical churches exist, and many of them are not affiliated with a particular denomination. Some multidenominational Christian groups, such as the Gospel Missionary Union, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice, have been active for more than 60 years.

Many of the religious groups registered with the Government have very small numbers; these include Anglicans, Baha'is, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and the Unification Church. Other groups present in small numbers are Muslims, Jews, and adherents of Eastern Orthodox religions. There are also followers of Inti, the traditional Inca sun god, and some atheists, but there were no reliable statistics on the size of these smaller groups.

In large cities, Protestant megachurches, with more than 10,000 members, continued to grow substantially. There is a high percentage of mestizo Protestants in the Guayaquil area.

Protestant organizations were usually divided between predominantly indigenous organizations, such as the Council of Evangelical Indigenous People and Organizations (FEINE), and mestizo organizations.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution grants all citizens and foreigners the right to practice publicly and freely the religion of their choice. The only limits imposed by the Government 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 requires religious groups to be licensed or registered if they engage in proselytizing activity. Religious organizations that do not engage in such activity may still choose to register to obtain a legal identity, which is desirable when entering into contracts. Any religious organization wishing to register with the Government must posses a charter, have 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 15 members. In addition, groups must file a petition with the Ministry of Government, using a licensed attorney, and pay a $100 registration fee. During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to streamline the registration process for religious groups.

The Government permits missionary activity and public religious expression by all religious groups.

The Government does not generally permit religious instruction in public schools. Private schools have complete liberty to provide religious instruction, as do parents in the home.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Catholics reportedly complained that the Government restricted access for ecological reasons to the Galapagos Islands to the extent that foreign missionaries had difficulty ministering to the 14,500 resident Catholics.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On August 27, 2006, two military officers (Ivan Santi Mucushigua and Cervantes Santamaría Cuji) and a civilian (Lucio Cirilo Dahua) allegedly killed Balti Cadena, a traditional healer (yachak), and injured one of his sons, near the Amazonas Military Fort in Puyo, Pastaza Province. The Public Prosecutor, in a civilian court, charged the two military officers with murder. At the end of the reporting period, the officers were held at the Amazonas Military Fort and had appealed to the Superior Court of Puyo. Press reports added that at least four traditional healers have been killed in the past 10 years in the same area.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Many religious groups increased their outreach efforts to their counterparts during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy staff met with leaders of numerous religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Muslim community, and various Protestant groups to monitor the status of religious freedom.

EL SALVADOR

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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; preliminary data from the 2007 census indicates that the population is 5.8 million. The country is predominantly Roman Catholic, with a sizeable Protestant minority, plus small communities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Hare Krishna, Muslims,

and Jews, among others. A very small segment of the population observes indigenous religious practices.

According to an October 2006 survey by the Technological University Public Opinion Center, 48 percent of the population was Roman Catholic. (There are diverse religious views among Catholics groups, including a Charismatic Renewal group that, according to press reports, constitutes more than 6 percent of Catholics.) Some 28.2 percent are members of Protestant churches. (Among Protestants, informal church estimates suggest that approximately 35 percent are Baptists and members of Assemblies of God.) Groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons; 14.6 percent are not affiliated with any religious group.

Several missionary groups are active.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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.

In March 2007 the Government denied entry to Jose Luis Miranda, who claimed to be the antichrist and whose church is not registered with the Government. In 2006 Miranda created a public disturbance when he carried out public rituals in front of the National Cathedral, destroying Catholic images and burning Bibles. On April 26, 2007, the Legislative Assembly voted unanimously to amend article 296 of the Penal Code to impose criminal sentences (6 months to 2 years) on those who publicly offend or insult the religious beliefs of others, or who damage or destroy religious objects. If such acts are carried out with and for the purpose of publicity, sentences increase to 1 to 3 years in prison. Repeat offenders face prison sentences of 3 to 6 years, and in cases where further infractions are repeated "with publicity," a maximum penalty of 8 years in prison can be imposed.

The Constitution requires the president, cabinet ministers and vice ministers, Supreme Court justices, judges, governors, attorney general, 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.

A 1940 law established Holy Week holidays for public employees, and each year the Legislative Assembly issues a decree establishing Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday as official holidays for the private sector.

The Constitution explicitly recognizes the Roman Catholic Church and grants it special legal status. In addition the law governing nonprofit organizations and foundations states that such groups may register for official status; although not required to register with the Government, a group must do so if it wants to incorporate formally. The civil code gives equal status to churches as nonprofit foundations. For formal recognition, they must apply through the Office of the Director General for Nonprofit Associations and Foundations (DGFASFL) within the Ministry of Governance. Each group must present a constitution and bylaws that describe, among other things, the type of organization, location of offices, goals and principles, requirements for membership, type and function of ruling bodies, and assessments or dues. Before the DGFASFL can grant registration, it must determine that the group's constitution and bylaws do not violate the law. Once a group is registered, notice of DGFASFL approval and the group's constitution and bylaws must be published in the official gazette.

The law for nonprofit organizations and foundations charges the Ministry of Governance with registering, regulating, and overseeing the finances of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), non-Catholic churches, and other religious groups. The law specifically exempts unions, cooperatives, and the Catholic Church from this registration requirement. During the period covered by this report, there were 130 requests for new registration, of which 56 were approved, 72 were pending, and 2 lacked the necessary documentation for approval.

Regulations implementing the tax law grant tax-exempt status to recognized non-Catholic churches and other religious groups. The regulations also make donations to recognized churches tax-deductible.

Noncitizens who are in the country primarily to proselytize must obtain a special residence visa for religious activities and are not allowed to proselytize while on a visitor or tourist visa.

Public education is secular. Private religious schools operate freely. All private schools, whether religious or secular, must meet the same standards to achieve Ministry of Education approval.

The President attends different religious ceremonies to promote interfaith understanding.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. In 2006 Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders founded the Council of Religions for Peace. Leaders of the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, evangelical, Islamic, Jewish, and Buddhist religious groups participated.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain a regular dialogue with principal religious leaders, church officers, church-sponsored universities, and NGOs.

GRENADA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, including the islands of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique, has an area of 133 square miles and in 2004 a population of just under 105,000. There are 96,000 persons on the island of Grenada, 8,000 on Carriacou, and 900 on Petite Martinique. According to the most recent census (2001), 44 percent of the general population is Roman Catholic, 12 percent is Anglican, 11 percent is Pentecostal, and 11 percent is Seventh-day Adventist. Religious groups with 2 percent or more adherents include Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of God, Baptist, and Evangelical. Religious groups with 1 percent or less of the total population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Brethren, Baha'i, Hindu, Moravian, Muslim, Presbyterian, Rastafarian, and Salvation Army. In addition, there are small communities of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Mennonites. Approximately 4 percent of the population count themselves as nonbelievers. There is one mosque. A number of denominations increase each year with the influx of 3,700 mostly foreign university students; however, the Government does not count them in its census data.

Reportedly more than 60 percent of the population regularly participated in formal religious services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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.

Only the Christian holy days of Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Religious groups must register with the Prime Minister's Office, which is responsible for issuing licenses for religious groups, buildings, and events. Registration entitles them to some customs and import tax exemptions.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The Conference of Churches Grenada, which was created over a decade ago, facilitated closer relations among various religious organizations. In 2004 hurricane Ivan damaged 98 percent of the churches. Faith-based organizations continued their collaboration to repair damaged churches.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

GUATEMALA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 12.7 million. According to official census data, the indigenous population is 43 percent, although unofficial estimates are higher.

The religious demography has changed significantly over the last few decades, influenced by political and societal changes. Historically, the country was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic; however, in recent years new religious groups have flourished.

There was no official census of religious affiliation. The Episcopal Conference of Guatemala, the official ruling body of the Catholic Church, estimated that 68 percent of the population is Catholic (2006). Alianza Evangelica, the official umbrella organization for Protestants, estimated that 25 percent of the population is Protestant. A 2006 survey conducted by Latinobarómetro indicated that Catholics comprise 56.9 percent of the population and evangelicals 30.7 percent. The largest Protestant group is the Full Gospel Church, followed by the Assembly of God, the Central American Church, and the Prince of Peace Church, as well as many inde-

pendent evangelical groups. Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Seventh-day Adventists are present, as are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses. Jews (approximately 2,000) and Muslims reside primarily in the capital. Few citizens consider themselves atheists.

Catholic and Protestant churches are distributed throughout the country, and their adherents are found among all major ethnic groups and political parties. According to leaders of Mayan spiritual organizations and Catholic and Protestant missionaries, many indigenous Catholics and some Protestants also practice some form of indigenous spiritual ritual.

Christian missionaries work in both religious and social capacities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion; however, article 37 of 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. The Government requires religious organizations as well as nonreligious associations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register as legal entities in order to conduct business such as renting or purchasing premises, entering into contracts, and enjoying tax-exempt status. The Government does not charge religious groups a registration fee.

Due to its historical presence since colonial times, the Catholic Church does not have to register as a legal entity; the Constitution recognizes it as such. Any other religious group may file a copy of its bylaws and a list of its initial membership with the Ministry of Government to receive formal recognition. The group must have at least 25 initial members, and the bylaws must reflect an intention to pursue religious 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 found the application process lengthy (lasting from 6 months to several years), and estimated that due to these difficulties 8,000 Protestant churches either had not applied for registration or had not completed the process.

Foreign missionaries must obtain tourist visas, which are issued for renewable periods of 3 months. After renewing their tourist visa once, they may apply for temporary residence. Specific missionary visas are neither issued nor required.

The Government does not subsidize religious groups. The Constitution permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. There is no national framework for determining the nature or content of this religious instruction; when provided, it tends to be programmed at the local level. During the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Education consulted with the Catholic Church and Protestant groups on the integration of general values focusing on good citizenship, although not specific religious teachings, into school curriculums.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Although registered religious entities are legally exempt from taxes, Protestant leaders noted that local officials sometimes required their churches to pay property taxes.

On April 3, 2007, the Government denied an entry visa to Puerto Rican Jose Luis Miranda, who claimed to be the antichrist. The Immigration Director based his decision on article 29 of the Immigration Law, which grants Immigration the authority to permit or deny entry to any foreigner. Miranda's followers threatened to appeal the decision. His church, "Creciendo en Gracia," is fully registered and recognized by the Government and holds regular meetings in Guatemala City. Jose Luis Miranda was granted permission to enter and preach several times previously since founding his church in Puerto Rico in 1986.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The ecumenical movement 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 Interreligious Dialogue and the Foro Guatemala to discuss social and political topics.

Evangelical Protestant churches were split between a majority group, which avoided ecumenical engagement with other religious traditions, and a minority group, which actively promoted an ecumenical and multicultural viewpoint.

Mayan spiritual leaders continued to note widespread disagreements with evangelical Protestants, and to a lesser extent, charismatic Catholics. Protestant churches historically have been less tolerant of indigenous practices than the Catholic Church, whose approach in many areas of the country is to tolerate traditional practice not directly in conflict with Catholic dogma. During the Spanish colonial period, some Catholic churches were built on sacred Mayan sites. Mayan leaders reported that in a few areas Catholic priests have forbidden followers of Mayan spirituality access to these sites, although the law permits Mayan spirituality groups to conduct religious ceremonies at Mayan historical sites on Government-owned property.

Although many members of evangelical congregations are indigenous, some local evangelical leaders denounced traditional religious practices as "witchcraft" or "devil worship" and discouraged their indigenous members from traditional religious practices.

SECTION IV. U.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 Embassy promoted dialogue between leaders of Mayan and ladino groups within civil society and within diverse religious communities.

GUYANA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote 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 a population of 751,000. Data from a 2002 census on religious affiliation indicates that approximately 57 percent of the population is Christian: 17 percent Pentecostal, 8 percent Roman Catholic, 7 percent Anglican, 5 percent Seventh-day Adventist, and 20 percent other Christian groups. Approximately 28 percent is Hindu, 7 percent is Muslim (mostly Sunni), and 2 percent practice other beliefs, including Rastafarianism and Baha'ism. An estimated 4 percent of the population does not profess any religion.

The country is ethnically diverse, reflecting East Indian, African, Chinese, and European ancestry, as well as a significant indigenous population. Members of all ethnic groups are well represented in all religious groups, with two exceptions: most Hindus are Indo-Guyanese, and nearly all Rastafarians are Afro-Guyanese. Foreign missionaries from many religious groups are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The law protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to interpret their religious beliefs for themselves. Members of all religious groups worshipped freely. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion, and the Government practiced no form of religious favoritism or discrimination.

While the Government recognizes religious groups of all faiths, they must register with the Government to receive formal recognition. Religious groups seeking to establish operations must first obtain permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. In the past, access to Amerindian areas required permission from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs; however, under the 2006 revision of the Amerindian Act only the permission of the local Village Council is required. There is no formal monitoring of religious groups.

The following holy days are national holidays: Christian-Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas; Hindu-Phagwah (festival welcoming spring) and Diwali (festival of lights); Islamic-You-Man-Nabi (birth of the Prophet Muhammad) and Eid Al-Adha (feast of sacrifice).

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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Guyana Defense Force (GDF) makes an effort to coordinate with civilian religious groups to provide personnel with access to religious services. Leaders of all major religious groups provided prayer and counseling, although generally only Christian sermons were given on GDF bases. Although no official GDF policy requires attendance at religious services, anecdotal evidence from GDF officers suggests that individual commanders required attendance at some religious programs. Membership in a particular religion did not confer any advantage or disadvantage; however, general military practice tended to be biased in favor of Christians.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), a nongovernmental umbrella organization for Christian, Hindu, Islamic, and Baha'i organizations, held events to promote peace during the August 2006 election. The IRO's role in supporting harmony among religious groups was largely supplanted by the Ethnic Relations Commission, a Government-constituted 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.

HAITI

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and a population of 8.4 million.

A U.N. Population Fund census released in May 2006 (based on 2003 data) revealed the following religious demographics: 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent Baptist, 7.9 percent Pentecostal, 3 percent Adventist, 2.1 percent voodoo (vodun), 1.5 percent Methodist, 0.7 percent Episcopalian, 0.5 percent Jehovah's Witnesses, 0.07 percent Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 0.02 percent Muslim, and 0.4 percent other religious affiliation; 10.2 percent reported they followed no religion. Census data did not account for the remaining 3.51 percent of the population.

The figure for voodoo represented only those who selected voodoo as their primary religion. A much larger segment of the population practices voodoo alongside Christianity (most commonly with Catholicism) and considers Christianity their primary religion. While the Government officially recognized voodoo as a religion in 2003, it continues to be frowned upon by the elite, conservative Catholics, and Protestants. The Government provides no legal status for voodoo except for its recognition as a legitimate religious practice.

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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution directs the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The administration and monitoring of religious affairs falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults. The Bureau of Religious Affairs within the Ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

The following holy days are observed officially as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Recognition by the Bureau of Religious Affairs 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 include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership list, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the Bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered. Many nondenominational Christian groups and voodoo practitioners have not sought official status; however, there were no reports of any instance in which this requirement hampered the operation of a religious group. According to the Government, many groups-Christian and voodoo-do not seek official recognition simply because they operate informally.

Goods brought into the country for use by registered religious groups and missionaries are exempt from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Some religious organizations complained that customs officials sometimes refused to honor their tax-exempt status; however, it appeared that these refusals generally were attempts by corrupt officials to extort bribes rather than to limit religious practices.

Historically Roman Catholicism was the official religion. 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 Catholic Church (and its religious orders) and the state. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religious groups. 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 increasing role of Protestant churches. For example, Episcopal and other Protestant clergy and voodoo practitioners have been invited to participate when the religious sector is asked to play an advisory role in politics.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches were present and operated hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics.

Foreign missionaries enter on regular tourist visas and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to register with the Bureau of Religious Affairs. While some missionaries were concerned by the slowness of the Government in issuing 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 prohibit proselytization on behalf of the church with which they are affiliated.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Religion plays a prominent role in society. Many citizens display a keen interest in religious matters and freely express their religious beliefs.

Ecumenical organizations existed. Interfaith cooperation was perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools.

While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, Christian attitudes toward voodoo ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. In the past these differing perspectives led to isolated instances of conflict. The Bureau of Religious Affairs effectively managed periodic tension between some Protestant and voodoo groups, in some cases sending representatives to assist local authorities.

Some Protestant and Catholic clergy were politically active. One Protestant pastor led the Christian Movement for a New Haiti political party, and another led the National Union of Christians for the Renovation of Haiti political party. The Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Protestant Federation occasionally issued statements on political 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. U.S. Embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views of the political process.

HONDURAS

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 7 million. An estimated 90 percent of the population was mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), and 7 percent Amerindian; the rest were of European, African, Asian, and Arab descent.

There are no reliable Government statistics on membership in churches. The Roman Catholic Church reports membership of slightly more than 80 percent of the

population. In the most recent countrywide survey taken in 2002, the Le Vote Harris reports that 63 percent of respondents identify themselves as Catholics, 23 percent as evangelical Protestant Christians, and 14 percent as "other" or provide no answer. The principal religious groups are Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant churches. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission Churches. A growing number of evangelical churches have no denominational affiliation. The National Association of Evangelical Pastors represents the evangelical leadership. There are small numbers of Muslims and Jews. There are a mosque and a synagogue in San Pedro Sula and a synagogue in Tegucigalpa.

Missionaries are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion. However, the armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. During the period covered by this report, the Catholic Church began developing plans with the armed forces to provide religious chaplains to the military. The Government consults with the Catholic Church and occasionally appoints Catholic leaders to quasi-official commissions on key subjects of mutual concern, such as anticorruption initiatives. Prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions, including the National Council of Anticorruption.

The Christian holy days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Although the Government does not require religious groups to register, those who receive "juridical personality" status are accorded tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty on imports. The Constitution grants the president the power to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious organizations. Associations are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group of leaders from the Evangelical Fraternity of Churches for review. This group has the power to suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications also are referred to the Solicitor General's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The president signs the approved resolutions granting juridical personality. There were no reports that the Ministry of Government and Justice rejected any such application submitted by a religious group during the period covered by this report.

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.

Under article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony, the Government prohibits immigration of foreign missionaries who practice religions that claim to use witchcraft or satanic rituals and allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud. During the period covered by this report, there were no complaints that the measure constituted a violation of freedom of religion.

There are 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In spring 2007 the Government denied entry to Jose Luis Miranda, who claimed to be the antichrist and has rallied against Catholic and evangelical churches. The Government declared that he presented a security risk. A small group of his supporters marched to protest the action without incident.

The Constitution stipulates that only lay people may seek election to the Congress.

The Catholic Church continued to seek 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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The Catholic Church designated the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the Archbishop established an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue section within his archdiocese.

There were few reports of discriminatory popular attitudes against persons of Arab descent, both first-generation immigrants and long-term residents. Most persons of Arab descent 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 maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.

JAMAICA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious of belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 2.7 million. According to the most recent census (2001), the population's religious affiliation consisted of Church of God, 24 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent; Pentecostal, 10 percent; Baptist, 7 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. The census reported that 21 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

In March 2006 the new Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller instructed her Cabinet to ensure that each Government board had a pastor appointed to it. It was clear this initiative was directed at Christians; however, it appeared that religious leaders of all religious groups could be eligible for appointment.

The Christian holy days of Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Parliament may act freely to recognize a religious group; however, registration is not mandatory. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison.

Foreign missionaries are subject to no restrictions other than the same immigration controls that govern other foreign visitors.

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 Catholic Church or Protestant denominations; there also is at least one Jewish school.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Members of the Rastafarian community continued to complain that law enforcement officials unfairly targeted them. However, it was not clear whether such complaints reflected discrimination on the basis of religious belief or were due to the group's illegal use of marijuana as part of Rastafarian religious practice. In 2003 a parliamentary joint select committee on marijuana recommended decriminalization of possession of small quantities for adult personal use. In April 2006 the Senate passed a resolution to have the committee reconvene and conclude its deliberations. At the end of the period covered by this report, the bill was still in Parliament.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious of belief or practice. Local media outlets continued to provide a forum for extensive, open coverage and debate on matters of 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.

MEXICO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions at the local level.

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

There were some reports of societal abuses, usually in small, rural communities in the south. Most such incidents occurred in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. Government officials, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and evangelical and Roman Catholic representatives agreed that the roots of these conflicts sometimes lay in a combination of political, ethnic, or land disputes which were often connected to the traditional "practices and customs" of indigenous communities.

The U.S. 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 a population of 107 million.

According to the Government's 2000 census, approximately 88 percent of respondents identify themselves as at least nominally Catholic. There are an estimated 11,000 Catholic churches and 14,000 Catholic priests and nuns. An additional estimated 90,000 laypersons worked in the Catholic Church. Other religious groups for which the 2000 census provides estimates include evangelicals (Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals, and Pentecostal Roots, which in turn include Live God Church, Truth

Column and Support, and the World's Light), with 1.71 percent of the population; other Protestant evangelical groups, 2.79 percent; members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1.25 percent; "historical" Protestants (defined by the Government as Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Nazarene, Mennonite, and others), 0.71 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 0.58 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 0.25 percent; Jews, 0.05 percent; and other religions, 0.31 percent. Approximately 3.52 percent of respondents indicated "no religion," and 0.86 percent did not specify a religion.

The General Director for Religious Associations of the Federal Secretariat of Government (GDAR) registered 3,472 evangelical and 80 traditional Protestant associations by the end of the reporting period. The exact number of evangelical and Protestant churches and pastors is unknown, and statistics on membership remain scant. Official figures sometimes differed from membership claims of religious groups. For example, the Seventh-day Adventist Church claim a nationwide membership of 600,000 to 700,000 persons; however, according to the 2000 census, only 488,945 persons identify themselves as such. Also according to the 2000 census, 205,229 persons identify themselves as Mormons, whereas the Mormon Church claims a nationwide membership of approximately 1.2 million.

Non-Catholic Christians are concentrated primarily in the south. In Chiapas, 21.9 percent of respondents in the 2000 census identify themselves as Protestant; however, some Protestant evangelical groups claim that their coreligionists constituted a much higher percentage of the population.

The Jewish community claims approximately 50,000 members; by far the largest number lives in Mexico City, although there also are organized congregations in Guadalajara, Monterrey, Tijuana, and Cancun. 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. Some indigenous people in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatán practice a syncretic religion that mixes Catholic and pre-Hispanic Mayan religious beliefs.

In some communities, particularly in the south, there is a correlation between politics and religion. A small number of local leaders often reportedly manipulate religious tensions in their communities for their own political or economic benefit, particularly in Chiapas.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. State and municipal governments generally protected this right; however, local community leaders, particularly in the south, infringed on religious freedom, using religion as a pretext for conflicts related to political, ethnic, or land disputes.

The Constitution states that all persons are free to profess their chosen religious belief and to practice its ceremonies and acts of worship. Congress may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The Constitution also provides for the separation of church and state. The Constitution 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 1992 Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship defines the administrative remedies that protect the right to religious freedom. In 2001 a provision was added to the Constitution that establishes a prohibition against any form of discrimination, including discrimination against persons on the basis of religion.

The law permits religious groups to operate informally without registering with the Government. However, if a religious community wishes to take on a legal personality, which is necessary for it to enter into contracts and purchase or rent land, it must register with the GDAR as a religious association. The registration process is routine. The most recent statistics showed that 6,661 religious associations were registered, of which the majority were evangelical Protestant or Catholic. During the period covered by this report, the GDAR registered 155 associations, some of which had applied for registration previously. In addition, at the end of the period covered by this report, 207 applications either awaited further supporting documentation or were not in compliance with registration criteria.

To be registered as a religious association, a group must articulate its fundamental doctrines and religious beliefs, not be organized primarily for profit, and not promote acts that are physically harmful or dangerous to its members. Religious groups must be registered to apply for official building permits, receive tax exemptions, and hold religious meetings outside of their places of worship. Religious associations must notify the Government of their intent to hold a religious meeting out-

side of a licensed place of worship. Thousands of notifications are typically submitted every year, and the Government routinely approves such requests. Religious associations may not hold any sort of political meeting.

The GDAR promotes religious tolerance and investigates cases of religious intolerance. All religious associations have equal access to the GDAR for registering complaints. The GDAR has translated the Religious Associations Law into 9 indigenous languages, with the intention of completing a total of 16. Its officials generally are responsive and helpful in mediating disputes among religious communities. When parties present a religious dispute to the GDAR, it attempts to mediate a solution. If mediation fails, the parties may submit the problem to the GDAR 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).

The Federal Government coordinates religious affairs through the Ministry of Interior. Three states-Chiapas, Guerrero, and Nuevo León-have their own under secretaries for religious affairs. Other states have specific offices dedicated to religious affairs, including: Campeche, Coahuila, Chihuahua, State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Zacatecas.

Of 8 official holidays, Christmas Day is the only Christian holy day. Most employers give holiday leave on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, Virgin of Guadalupe Day, and Christmas Eve.

The Government requires religious groups to apply for a permit to construct new buildings or convert existing buildings into houses of worship. Religious groups reported no difficulty in obtaining Government permission for these activities. Any religious building constructed after 1992 is the property of the religious association that built it. All religious buildings erected before 1992 are classified as national patrimony and owned by the state and exempt from taxes.

According to the law, religious groups may not own or administer broadcast radio or television stations. Government permission is required to transmit religious programming on commercial broadcast radio or television, and the Government routinely grants permission.

The Constitution provides that public education must be secular, but religious associations are free to maintain private schools. Primary-level homeschooling for religious reasons is not explicitly prohibited or supported by the law; however, to enter a secondary school, one must have attended an accredited primary school. Homeschooling is allowed at the secondary level after schooling at an accredited primary school has been completed.

The work of religious clergy in public institutions such as jails or hospitals is neither explicitly prohibited nor supported by law.

Missionaries are present. Although the Federal Government limits the number of visas each religious group is allowed, the application procedure is routine and uncomplicated.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Federal Government generally respects religious freedom in practice. However, poor enforcement mechanisms allowed community leaders in Chiapas and several other states to discriminate against persons based on their religious beliefs. Federal and local governments often failed to punish those responsible for acts of religiously motivated violence.

According to press reports, in April 2007 in the village of Tzotzil Maya, Zinacatan Municipality in the State of Chiapas, local authorities jailed Juan Mendez 2 days after his conversion, where they threatened to strip and beat him. The next morning he was released without being charged, but the evangelical community felt threatened by this incident.

The director of the Lázaro Cárdenas Teachers College in Arteaga, Michoacán, suspended six student teachers who were Jehovah's Witnesses, alleging that they lacked sufficient patriotic fervor. On February 7, 2007, four of the students appealed to the Federal court; the case was pending at the end of the reporting period. On September 26, 2006, a trial court upheld the suspension of another student, in contrast to recommendations issued by the National Commission of Human Rights. In May 2006 another student appealed to the Federal court regarding the nature of

the authority of the school officials. The court decided in the student's favor, and he subsequently appealed the suspension in Federal court; his case was pending also.

Local authorities in Xocotlán, Texcoco Municipality of the State of Mexico, pressed evangelical church-goers to contribute financially to local celebrations and for repairs of the church's cupola, threatening them with suspension of potable water services if they did not. In January 2007 the GDAR learned about this issue and was informed by the State of Mexico that in June 2007 there was a negotiated settlement allowing the evangelicals to freely practice their religion without community pressure.

In late 2006 in Chicviltenal, Chiapas, three students were allegedly expelled from their elementary school because their parents were Protestants. News reports alleged that the students' parents were jailed for 15 hours and fined for practicing an evangelical religion. The State Directorate for Religious Affairs stated that it was not specifically aware of this case but reported that two evangelicals were jailed in that community and then immediately released. On November 30, 2006, the evangelicals signed an agreement completed under the indigenous system of "practices and customs" stating they would not proselytize their religion without authorization from authorities. This agreement was not authorized by local, state, or Federal officials. The State Directorate for Religious Affairs stated that it would try to prevent future occurrences of this sort.

Abbot Avelino Solano, a member of an evangelical family in the community of Pascala del Oro, in the San Luis Acatlán Municipality of Guerrero, was jailed and his family threatened with expulsion. The GDAR reported that he was jailed by community leaders for failing to fulfill work responsibilities rather than for his religious beliefs.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were some reports of social abuses, usually in small, rural communities in the south. Religious differences frequently were the cited cause of such incidents; however, the disputes often involved several underlying factors, including ethnic differences, land disputes, and struggles over local political and economic power.

In the central and southern regions, some leaders of predominantly Catholic indigenous communities regarded evangelical groups as unwelcome outside influences and as economic and political threats. These leaders sometimes acquiesced in or ordered the harassment or expulsion of individuals belonging chiefly to Protestant evangelical groups. As in previous reporting periods, village leaders imposed sanctions on evangelicals for resisting participation in community festivals or refusing to work on Sundays. Common complaints by evangelicals included local leaders cutting off the water supply or being denied benefits from Government programs because of their religion.

This was particularly common in Chiapas, where many residents follow a unique and centuries-old syncretistic mix of Catholicism and native custom (Catholic-Mayan). Endemic poverty, land tenure disputes, and lack of educational opportunities also contributed to tensions, which at times resulted in violence.

Evangelicals often resisted making financial donations demanded by community norms that served partly to fund local festivals typically occurring on Catholic holidays and often involving alcohol. The National Bar of Christian Lawyers reported 200 cases of unresolved religious intolerance against evangelical Christians in Chiapas.

On April 14, 2007, a Pentecostal church was reportedly destroyed in Ollas, San Juan Chamula Municipality in the State of Chiapas. The State Directorate for Religious Affairs reported that evangelical families lacked a permit to build the church, of which they had only recently begun construction. It also stated that the San Juan Chamula Municipality designated 130 locations expressly for evangelicals.

On March 7, 2007, the newspaper *El Pueblo* published a statement that five evangelical families of the community of Huehuetepec, in the Atlamajalcingo del Monte Municipality of Guerrero, would be expelled from the town by community leaders for refusing to participate in community services, such as road work and the construction and painting of community buildings.

On February 10, 2007, in Chiepetlán, Guerrero, the community assembly expelled three evangelical families for refusing to participate in obligatory community service and for "infringing on" the customs of the town. The GDAR characterized this as a land dispute and organized negotiations with the aim of peacefully resolving the dispute.

According to the GDAR, on January 31, 2007, in San Juan Chamula Municipality in the State of Chiapas, shots were fired at three evangelicals driving home from San Cristobal de las Casas, allegedly because of their religious affiliation. They required hospitalization.

In January 2007, according to news reports, local community leaders (caciques) in Los Pozos in the State of Chiapas, suspended electrical and water utilities of more than 65 evangelicals and threatened to expel them from their homes. Following an agreement on April 23, the local community leaders ceased forcing the evangelicals to make donations towards the community festivals, which involved alcohol and which the evangelicals considered pagan and idolatrous. However, despite signed agreements with the officials of the Huixtan Municipality and the State of Chiapas, the evangelicals reportedly were still without electricity and water at the end of the reporting period. Also in Los Pozos, the *La Jornada* newspaper reported that at least 10 evangelicals did not receive the benefits due them under the agricultural Program of Direct Rural Support (PROCAMPO) because of their religious affiliation. The State Directorate for Religious Affairs reported that an interagency state commission facilitated dialogue between the evangelicals and community leaders, and on April 15, 2007, signed an agreement in which the parties established the freedom of religious belief and mutual respect, including for the community's practices and customs.

According to the GDAR, on November 27, 2006, community leaders in Ahuetetla, in the Tepehuacan de Guerrero Municipality in the state of Hidalgo, threatened evangelical parishioners with physical attack and the suspension of power and water services if they continued their religious meetings and did not participate in the town's Catholic celebrations.

Members of the National Bar of Christian Lawyers reported that Rodolfo Lopez Velazco and his family were displaced from their community, located in Tierra Blanca, in the Ocosingo Municipality of Chiapas, for holding non-Catholic religious beliefs. Their house was burned and their land destroyed.

The religious association, Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, reported that persons from the town of San Miguel Acuexcomac, in the San Juan Tzicatlacoyan Municipality of Puebla, prevented a group of Jehovah's Witnesses from visiting the town to proselytize. The town's Catholic priest allegedly sought to expel them from the community if their attempts continued.

Every year since 1994, traditionalist local leaders in Chiapas have denied approximately 150 children access to the local public schools in 6 indigenous communities because they are evangelicals. The students 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 the state of Oaxaca, local leaders expelled members of Jehovah's Witnesses and destroyed their place of worship. From August to September 2006, many returned home after a change in the leadership of the area and the State Commission of Human Rights' official recommendation safeguarding their right to religious freedom. In October 2006, however, the Jehovah's Witnesses were instructed to go to a meeting in San Miguel Reyes in Putla de Guerrero, where they were arrested for no apparent reason. Upon their release by the Public Ministry, they chose not to return to their former homes. When state authorities later enforced the official recommendation, they returned and resumed their worship services.

In Nuevo Jerusalem, Michoacán, 150 families and 31 religious leaders of the town's religious group were threatened with expulsion from the community by October 7, 2006, if they did not accept Agapito Gomez Aguilar, accused of rape and murder, as their leader; however, they were not expelled and remained in the community. The GDAR reported this was not a religious conflict, but rather an internal group dispute over control of the community.

While state government officials claimed to have resolved the March 2005 conflict between Catholics and Protestants in the town of Zinacantan, Chiapas, civil society members disagreed and reported that an inclination towards violence persisted. On August 22, 2006, tensions emerged again during the gubernatorial campaign. According to media reports, groups of Catholics and Protestants, allegedly associated with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), respectively, clashed when Protestant parents were reportedly not allowed to participate in election-day festivities. A PRD-linked Protestant reportedly shot and killed a PRI-linked Catholic; two persons were injured, and sev-

eral members of both groups were detained. The State Directorate for Religious Affairs attributed the events to social and political rather than religious tensions. Four persons remained in jail, and the case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In July 2006 in San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, the media reported that PRI-affiliated Catholics allegedly destroyed an illegally constructed evangelical church that was attended by members of the PRD. The PRI-affiliated group threatened to expel or kill eight evangelical families if they attempted to rebuild. On July 28, according to state officials, the parties involved resolved the dispute and signed an agreement to respect local authority and religious freedom.

On October 25, 2005, Catholic priest Luis Velasquez Romero was bound and killed in Tijuana. The reason for the killing was not determined, but the GDAR stated this did not involve a religious conflict. The assassin, who himself was killed as a result of drug-related violence in May 2007, was neither apprehended nor charged.

The State Attorney General and State Directorate for Religious Affairs ruled that the case of two men detained for the 2003 killing of evangelical Christian pastor Mariano Diaz Mendez, near the town of San Juan Chamula in Chiapas, involved a personal dispute rather than religious intolerance. The State Directorate for Religious Affairs stated that Sebastian and Manuel Jimenez Lopez were sentenced to 25 years for Mendez's murder. They were serving their sentence in a prison in Cintalapa Municipality in the State of Chiapas.

The GDAR stated that during the reporting period, it had received 9 new reports of conflicts related to religious intolerance and that 14 pending conflicts had been resolved. Government officials, the national human rights ombudsman, and interfaith groups continued to conduct discussions about incidents of intolerance in order to promote social peace. The Mexico City Interfaith Council included representatives from the Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Mormon, Lutheran, other Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh Dharma, and Sufi Islam communities. Interfaith councils were also established in Chiapas, Nuevo León, and the Yucatán.

SECTION IV. U.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 these issues with Government offices for religious and indigenous affairs and human rights at Federal and state levels. Embassy officers also met with members of religious groups and nongovernmental organizations.

NICARAGUA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 5.5 million. More than 80 percent of the population belongs to Christian groups. According to a 2005 census conducted by the governmental Nicaraguan Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), 58.5 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 21.6 percent is evangelical Protestant. Two percent is associated with other unspecified religious groups, 1.6 percent belongs to the Moravian Church, less than 1 percent is associated with the Jehovah's Witnesses, and 15.7 percent profess no religious affiliation or are atheists. The evangelicals include Assembly of God, Pentecostal, Mennonite, Baptist, and other small denominations. A June 2007 poll shows a similar breakdown.

Both Catholic and evangelical leaders regarded the census results as biased. Survey methodology was questioned as well as the counting of those who converted from Catholicism to an evangelical denomination but later returned to Catholicism. In addition some religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), were sometimes incorrectly categorized as "evangelical." According to the Nicaraguan Institute of Evangelicals, their numbers are actually lower than the surveys suggested, between 15 and 18 percent of the population, a result of the methodological problems.

Non-Christian communities are few and small. The Jewish community counts fewer than 50 persons (including expatriates). They gather for religious holidays and Sabbath dinners but do not have an ordained rabbi or a synagogue. According to community members, the last synagogue was firebombed by a Sandinista street mob in 1978.

There are approximately 1,200 to 1,500 Muslims, mostly Sunnis who are resident aliens or naturalized citizens from Palestine, Libya, and Iran. Muslims worship freely. The Islamic Cultural Center in Managua serves as the primary prayer center for Muslims in the city, with approximately 320 men attending on a regular basis. Muslims from Granada, Masaya, Leon, and Chinandega also travel to the Managua prayer center on Fridays for prayers. Granada, Masaya, and Leon have smaller prayer centers in the homes of prominent local Muslims. In May 2007 the Sunni leader of the Managua prayer center was dismissed, due to the increase in Iranian influence in the Muslim community and was to be replaced by a Shi'a religious leader. By the end of the reporting period the Shi'a leader had not been identified. The Muslim community reportedly had plans to build a mosque in Managua.

Minority religious groups include Baha'is and the Church of Scientology. Immigrant groups include Palestinian Christians whose ancestors came to Central America in the early 1900s, and Chinese, many of whom arrived as Christians or intermarried with citizens and converted to Christianity. Some immigrant communities, including South Koreans, formed their own Protestant churches without Government interference.

There were no longer any pre-Columbian religions in the country, although there was a "freedom movement" within some Moravian churches to allow indigenous Amerindian spiritual expression, often through music. The Catholic Church frequently incorporated syncretic elements and did not criticize pre-Colombian aspects of Christian religious festivals.

Moravian, Episcopal, and Anglican 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. Creoles and Amerindians, who generally live along the Atlantic coast, are more likely to belong to the Moravian or Episcopal Churches. Some evangelical churches have a strong presence in the remote towns of the central south Atlantic region. Evangelicals tended to attract poor and unemployed persons with lower levels of education living in mostly rural and remote areas. Their numbers were increasing in rural areas of the interior and areas where the Catholic Church was not present.

The evangelical churches operated three private universities without interference from the Government. The Assemblies of God purported to be the largest evangelical denomination in the country. According to church leaders, there were more than 860 churches and 200,000 baptized members.

Anecdotal evidence suggests higher church attendance rates in evangelical churches than in Catholic and traditional Protestant churches. According to a Catholic official, while the Catholic Church was losing members to the evangelical movement, many converts eventually returned to the Catholic Church.

Missionaries are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution also states that no one "shall be obligated by coercive measures to declare their ideology or beliefs." The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.

There is no official state religion; however, due to its historical presence in the country since colonial times, the Catholic Church enjoys a close relationship with the Government. It is the most politically active religious group and wields significant political influence. Catholic Church leaders routinely meet with senior Government officials. The Ortega administration, in office since January 2007, appointed retired Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo to lead the newly created Council of Peace and Reconciliation, a decision which many criticized as a blurring of church and state. It was not endorsed by the Vatican. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) complained that the Ortega administration is using the church to advance

its political agenda. Some evangelical leaders complained that they were denied access to Government officials.

The historic context of church-state relations is such that most religiously-associated monuments, memorials, and holidays have a Catholic connection; however, the dominance of the Catholic Church did not have a negative effect on the religious freedom of others.

The following holy days are recognized as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. The Festival of Santo Domingo (August 1 and 10) is also celebrated, but only in Managua.

The Government's requirements for legal recognition of a religious group are similar to requirements for other NGOs. A group must apply for "personería juridica" (legal standing), which the National Assembly must approve. Following approval, the group must register with the Government as an association or foundation. Groups that do not register cannot obtain tax-exempt status (exoneration) and technically do not enjoy standing to incur legal obligations and enter into contracts; however, a number of groups did not register and continued to operate without penalty.

Goods donated to established churches and other registered nonprofit religious organizations 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 may be approved and the goods released. Because of perceived unequal treatment of different religious groups, exoneration remained a contentious issue, particularly regarding exemption from customs duties on imported goods donated for humanitarian purposes and eligibility for tax exemption on the purchase of vehicles.

Some churches and other nonprofit religious organizations, among them the Assemblies of God, continued to report delays in obtaining customs exemptions. A 2003 tax equity law, designed to facilitate the process, required all groups to requalify for exoneration. Many churches and other nonprofit religious organizations reported that the law generally streamlined the process; however, some maintained that the Catholic Church continued to receive preferential treatment and did not have to meet the same requirements as other religious and humanitarian organizations.

Missionaries had to obtain religious worker visas, which were routinely provided; however, the process, which must be completed before the missionary arrives, continued to take several months.

Religion is not taught in public schools, but private religious schools operate and accept students of all religious affiliations. The Government provides financial support to a number of Catholic primary and secondary schools by paying teacher salaries. In March 2007 the National Assembly approved approximately $5,000,000 (NIO 92,500,000) of the national budget to fund nonprofit NGOs and foundations. The largest share, approximately $670,000 (NIO 12,400,000), was earmarked for Catholic University Redemptoris Mater (Unica), the only private religious institution to receive monetary contributions from the Government.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In September 2006 the National Assembly introduced a controversial new amendment to the Law against Special Crimes against the Environment and Natural Resources, also known as the "noise law," which some organizations claim poses an infringement upon freedom of worship. The law ostensibly prohibits noise pollution near hospitals, clinics, and schools, and noise that exceeds the maximum safe level of decibels established by the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization. The change in the "noise law" led to friction between religious and secular groups. Citizens rights and environmental groups charged that the elevated noise levels caused by some evangelical followers, especially among the Pentecostal movement, disrupted neighborhoods and caused psychological and physical damage.

Some evangelical groups, such as Pentecostals, regarded the law as a restriction on their particular form of worship. Article nine of the law allegedly exempts church groups, asserting that it would not apply to activities of religious organizations as long as such activities were taking place under the roof of the house of worship. Another contentious element of the law concerns the requirement for organizers of large outdoor evangelical events and other proselytizing activities to first obtain a permit from the police or town council. Mauricio Fonseca, president of the Evangelical Alliance, charged the law is unfair to evangelicals. Conversely, other critics

complained the Government did not enforce the law because it was trying to win the Catholic and evangelical vote.

The Government reportedly denied entry to Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda, self-proclaimed antichrist and leader of the group Growing in Grace. In the end, Miranda did not arrive to participate in a conference on June 30, 2007. In lieu of a visit, Growing in Grace members arranged a teleconference linking Miranda in Miami to his followers in Managua. The group claimed to have a congregation of at least 1,000 members and has been active since 1997.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Relations among religious groups differed between the two coasts. There was a strong ecumenical spirit on the Atlantic coast, attributed to the long history and mutual respect of the three predominant Christian groups—the Moravian, Episcopalian, and Catholic. However, on the Pacific side, ecumenism was rare and there was competition between the Catholic and evangelical churches for adherents.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain a regular dialogue with the principal religious leaders and organizations in the country.

PANAMA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, with some qualifications, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 3.2 million. The Government does not collect statistics on the religious affiliation of citizens, but various sources estimate that 75 to 85 percent of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic and 15 to 25 percent as evangelical Christian. Smaller religious groups include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) with an estimated 20,000 to 40,000 members, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Episcopalians with between 7,000 and 10,000 members, Jewish and Muslim communities with approximately 10,000 members each, Hindus, Buddhists, and other Christians. Local Baha'is maintain one of the world's seven Baha'i Houses of Worship. Indigenous religions include Ibeorgun (among Kuna) and Mamatata (among Ngobe). There is also a small number of Rastafarians.

Catholics are found throughout the country and at all levels of society. Evangelical Christians also are dispersed geographically and are becoming more prominent in society. The mainstream Protestant denominations, which include Southern Baptist Convention and other Baptist congregations, United Methodist, Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas, and Lutheran, derive their membership from the Antillean black and the expatriate communities, both of which are concentrated in Panama and Colon Provinces. The Jewish community is centered largely in Panama City. Muslims live primarily in Panama City and Colon, with smaller but growing concentrations in David and other provincial cities. The vast majority of Muslims are of Lebanese, Palestinian, or Indian descent.

Missionaries were present.

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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Catholicism enjoys certain state-sanctioned advantages over other faiths. The Constitution recognizes Catholicism as "the religion of the majority" of citizens but does not designate it as the official state religion.

The Christian holy days of Good Friday and Christmas Day are national holidays.

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. Juridical personality allows a religious group to apply for all tax benefits available to nonprofit organizations. There were no reported cases of religious organizations being denied juridical personality or the associated tax benefits.

Most foreign religious workers are granted 3-month missionary worker visas. A 1-year extension customarily is granted, but 1 religious group complained in 2006 that obtaining the extension could take up to 4 months. Foreign missionaries who intend to remain longer than 15 months must repeat the entire application process. Such additional extensions usually are granted. Catholic priests and nuns and Jewish rabbis are eligible for a special 5-year visa.

The Constitution dictates that Catholicism be taught in public schools; however, parents have the right to exempt their children from religious instruction. The numerical predominance of Catholicism and the consideration given to it in the Constitution generally have not prejudiced other religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Constitution limits the type of public offices that religious leaders may hold to those related to social assistance, education, and scientific research.

In contrast with the previous reporting period, the Ombudsman's Office received no complaints of Rastafarian children being denied access to public school for refusal to cut their hair. According to the Ombudsman, the children in previous years' cases were allowed to return to school without having to cut their hair.

Unlike during the previous reporting period, Embassy officials received no reports of selective application of religious worker visa requirements.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Christian groups, including the Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Salvation Army, and Eastern Orthodox churches, participated in a successful ecumenical movement directed by the nongovernmental Panamanian Ecumenical Committee. Committee members also participated in an interreligious committee that included Jewish Reform, Islamic, Buddhist, Baha'i, Hindu, and Ibeorgun religious groups. The committee sponsored conferences to discuss matters of faith and practice and planned joint liturgical celebrations and charitable projects. The committee was 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.

SECTION IV. U.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 met with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom.

PARAGUAY

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote 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 a population of 6.7 million. According to the Government's 2002 national census, the population identified itself as follows: 89.6 percent Roman Catholic, 6.2 percent evangelical Christian, 1.1 percent other Christian, 0.6 percent indigenous religions, 0.3 percent other (non-Christian) religions, 1.1 percent non-religious, and 1 percent unknown. A 2006 survey indicated similar results; however, 84.7 percent of respondents considered themselves Roman Catholic, a decrease of 4.9 percent from 2002.

Prominent religious groups include Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Jewish (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and Baha'i. The eastern Department of Alto Parana has a large Islamic community as the result of substantial immigration from the Middle East, particularly Lebanon. A large Mennonite community flourishes 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 respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution and other laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion or exercise thereof.

The Constitution recognizes the historical role of the Catholic Church (the dominant religion) in public life, and Catholic priests often celebrate Mass at Government functions.

The following holy days are official national holidays: Maundy (Holy) Thursday, Good Friday, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (now known as the Founding of Asuncion), Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (now known as the Virgin of Caacupe Day), and Christmas.

All religious organizations and churches must register with the Ministry of the Interior. The criteria for recognition consist of completing required paperwork, obtaining certification as a nonprofit organization, passing financial and criminal background checks, and paying a small fee. The Government imposes few controls on religious groups, and many churches remain unregistered. These are typically small, Christian evangelical churches with few members.

The Government is secular. Most Government officials are Catholic, but adherence to a particular creed confers no legal advantage or disadvantage. The Armed Forces have an extensive Catholic chaplain program. The Catholic Church considers this chaplaincy as a diocese and appoints a bishop to oversee the program on a full-time basis.

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 curriculum requirements regarding 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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

In March 2007 unknown individuals spray-painted graffiti conveying messages and/or images commonly associated with anti-Semitism and pro-Nazism on the private property of a well-known radio commentator of Jewish descent. The Government investigated this case but made no arrests.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and Embassy officials met regularly with representatives of different religious groups. Embassy representatives raised concerns with the Government over the graffiti incident.

PERU

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 496,225 square miles and a population of 27.2 million. Among the major religious communities are Roman Catholics, various Protestant denominations (including Baptist, Anglican, Assembly of God, and others), Seventh-day Adventist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, the Baha'i Faith, Hare Krishnas, and Islam. There also are indigenous communities practicing various forms of pre-Columbian and syncretistic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, as well as a unique and well-organized local religious group, the Israelites of the New Universal Pact, which is unrelated to Israel or Judaism.

The 2006 National Continuous Census conducted by the National Statistics Institute (INEI) finds that 85 percent of the population that identified with a religion is Catholic and 11 percent Protestant; the remaining 4 percent includes Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Israelites of the New Universal Pact. Those who identify themselves as either agnostic or atheist comprise 1.4 percent of the population.

The Catholic nongovernmental organization (NGO) Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) estimates that only 5 percent of Catholics regularly attend weekly church services.

The membership of most religious groups remained fairly constant, but various evangelical Christian denominations had rapidly increasing congregations. According to some estimates, in the last 20 years, Protestant representation in the population grew from 2 to 3 percent to 10 to 15 percent.

The National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimates that evangelicals represent at least 15 percent of the population. Historically, evangelicals resided in smaller communities outside of Lima and in rural areas, but in the last 15 years their numbers in urban areas increased significantly. There are small Jewish populations in Lima and Cuzco and small Muslim communities in Lima (mostly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (predominantly of Pakistani origin).

The founder of the Israelites of the New Universal Pact organized the group in 1960 in Junin Department; most adherents are concentrated in and near Lima. Some Catholics combine indigenous worship with Catholic traditions. This type of

syncretistic religion is practiced most often in the Andean highlands. Indigenous people in the remote eastern jungles also practice traditional faiths.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely, although they do not receive the same privileges as the Catholic Church with respect to customs, immigration, and taxation.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Article 50 of the Constitution establishes separation of church and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The Government acts independently of Catholic Church policy. Nonetheless, it maintains a close relationship with the Church, and an agreement signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. Critics complained that the agreement was unconstitutional because it was signed with a military government, not by democratic representatives. Officials of the Church sometimes play a high-profile role in the public sector.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion, but the Catholic Church receives preferential treatment in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas, in accordance with the agreement. All work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops are exempt from income taxes. Buildings, houses, and other real estate owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction) may pay property taxes for schools and clergy residences. Some Catholic clergy and laypersons receive state remuneration in addition to the stipends paid to them by the Church. This applies to the country's 52 bishops, as well as to some priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the borders. In addition each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government. According to Catholic Church officials, none of these payments are substantial.

The executive branch formally interacts with religious communities on issues of religious freedom through the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry implements laws and interacts with the public through the Office of Catholic Affairs and through the Office of Interconfessional Affairs, which deals with non-Catholic religions. Both offices maintain a continuing dialogue with the Catholic Church and other organized religious groups on religious freedom. Both offices exist primarily to process complaints of religious discrimination and to assist religious groups in relations with the state, such as exemptions from import taxes and customs duties.

In 2004 the Ministry of Justice promulgated a regulation to enhance religious freedom and equality by allowing non-Catholic churches to receive state benefits similar to the Catholic Church; however, some evangelical Christian churches complained that this new regulation required a church to operate 7 years before being recognized. In addition many evangelical churches lack central lines of authority and doctrinal unity, complicating the process of registration. More hierarchical and established church groups supported strict registration requirements.

As a result of negotiations between the Ministry of Justice and an interfaith working group of non-Catholic religious groups, regulations now permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru (UNICEP), to register churches. The registration does not recognize churches officially but identifies those Protestant churches eligible for assistance from the Office of Interconfessional Affairs. The interfaith working group continues to advocate a draft law to promote further religious freedom and equality. The legislation is currently awaiting revisions in the Ministry of Justice. Congressmen have proposed at least three other draft laws on religious freedom. At the end of the period covered by this report, Congress had not taken action on the drafts.

All religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. During the period covered by this report, a member of the Lima Bar Association filed a discrimination complaint to protest the presence of a crucifix in the main lobby of the group's building.

The law mandates that all schools, public and private, impart religious education as part of the curriculum throughout the education process (primary and secondary), "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." Catholicism is the only religion taught in public schools. Many non-Catholic religious or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. The Education Ministry made it mandatory for the presiding Catholic bishop of an area to approve religious education teachers.

Parents who do not wish their public school children to participate in the mandatory religion classes must request an exemption in writing from the school principal. 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 for religious education; however, the parents must provide the teacher.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Freedom of Conscience Institute (PROLIBCO), an NGO that favors strict separation of church and state and opposes preferential treatment for any religious group, claimed that the financial subsidies and tax benefits given to the Catholic Church are far more extensive and lucrative than publicly acknowledged. Ministry of Justice officials stated that the Catholic Cardinal of Peru is paid $400 (PEN 1,260) per month, and six archbishops are given almost $300 (PEN 900) per month; other Catholic Church officials receive lesser amounts.

Catholic charities do not pay customs duties. Non-Catholics with extensive charitable activities complained that donations of goods from abroad are taxed at commercial rates. Catholics and non-Catholics are subject to equal taxation in regard to many, but not all, other activities. Catholics are exempt from paying taxes on places of worship and other religious buildings, and Catholic officials are exempt from taxes on certain kinds of travel.

In 2006 religious groups and the Ministry of Justice worked together to change residency documents to differentiate between "religious" and "nonreligious" status, rather than between "Catholic" and "non-Catholic," as had been done previously. This reform helped to equalize the immigration process so that non-Catholics are not disadvantaged.

Non-Catholic organizations complained that although their adherents are exempt from attending Catholic instruction, students who do so lose academic credits. Students who graduate from primary and secondary schools without these credits cannot be at the top of their class, regardless of other academic achievements. These students are thus disadvantaged in competition for scholarships or for admission to universities with competitive entry requirements.

By law the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains, and Catholicism is the only recognized religion for military personnel. A 1999 Government decree creating 40 Catholic military chaplaincies obliges members of the armed forces and the police, as well as relatives and civilian coworkers, to participate in Catholic services. There have been no reports of discrimination or denials of promotion for non-Catholic members of the military, nor of personnel refusing to participate in Catholic services. Some non-Catholic soldiers, however, have complained that it is difficult to find and attend Protestant religious services because of the lack of Protestant chaplains.

Some non-Catholic missionary groups have claimed that the law discriminates against them by taxing religious materials they import, including Bibles, whereas the Catholic Church is not taxed on such items.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In early May 2007 the remains of evangelical pastor Jorge Parraga Castillo were found at the Manta military base. On October 25, 1989, the military had detained him and took him to the base. Witnesses claim that the military tortured and killed Pastor Parraga and then burned his body. The Ombudsman's office did not believe that Pastor Parraga's death was related to his work as a pastor. By the end of the reporting period, no one had been charged in the killing, although an investigation by the Public Ministry was continuing.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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

President Garcia recognized Protestantism's growing influence by attending a service organized by Lima evangelical churches during his 2006 inauguration festivities. His action sparked debate about the need to balance freedom of religion with the country's traditional identity as a Catholic nation. Masses were often celebrated at Government-sponsored events—including those taking place on Government property; however, many new Congressmen broke with tradition by refusing to invoke either God or the Bible during swearing-in ceremonies.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Protestants gained high-level leadership positions in society. In 2005 two prominent evangelical pastors created the National Restoration (RN) party, which remained open to all religious groups. The party ran a candidate in the 2006 presidential elections who finished sixth and later ran a candidate in the Lima mayoral race who finished third. Three evangelical Protestants were elected to Congress. An evangelical Christian was elected president of Congress in August 2006.

Religious groups occasionally joined forces on ecumenical projects on behalf of the poor. The Catholic Church and evangelical churches collaborated closely in the area of human rights. The Catholic Church utilized evangelical church staff in rural areas to minister to its congregations when no priest was available. The Catholic Church (through the CEAS) and the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, an evangelical NGO, have conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and detainees wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason. Major political figures have promoted religious freedom in public affairs, and non-Catholic politicians have attained higher profiles.

SECTION IV. U.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 Catholic Church, Protestant groups, and the Jewish community. The Embassy also continued regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including the CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, UNICEP, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

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

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 104 square miles and a population of 46,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. An estimated 50 percent of the population adhere to Anglican beliefs, and 25 percent are Roman Catholic. Methodists, Moravians, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses are also present. Evangelical Christian groups have been gaining followers. There is a small Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) community. Minority religious groups include Rastafarians and members of the Baha'i Faith. There is no organized Jewish community, although there is a Jewish cemetery on Nevis.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Government is secular and did not interfere with an individual's right to worship.

The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for the registration of religious groups.

The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

There were two Catholic schools and a Seventh-day Adventist school. The Government did not contribute financially to these schools. The Government requires all schools to conduct morning Christian prayers and hymns.

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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

The St. Kitts Christian Council, which included Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, and other traditional Christian religious groups, conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different Christian denominations. The Evangelical Association united 11 churches in the evangelical community and promoted their interests.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

SAINT LUCIA

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 165,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. According to the 2001 population and housing census, Roman Catholics account for approximately 67 percent of the population. The second largest group is Seventh-day Adventists, comprising almost 9 percent of the population, followed by Pentecostals, with nearly 6 percent. Evangelicals and Anglicans each account for approximately 2 percent of the population, while Baptists and Methodists represent smaller numbers.

The total number of non-Christians is very small. There are an estimated 350 Muslims; while some of the Muslims are immigrants from other Caribbean countries, the Middle East, and South Asia, most Muslims are local converts. Muslims worship in two musallahs (informal places of worship) but are in the process of building a mosque. Other religious groups include Baha'is and Rastafarians; according to the 2001 census, Rastafarians numbered approximately 3,500 members.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government is secular and did not interfere with an individual's right to worship. The Government maintains a close relationship with the Christian Council, an

organization comprised of the Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations.

Christian holy days, including Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

The Government was revising its registration policy for religious groups, which was pending at the end of the reporting period. The Government suspended all applications for formal registration as a religious group until completion of this process. This moratorium affected the Muslim community, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 10 other organizations during this period. Official recognition allows a religious organization to have duty-free import privileges and the right to register births, deaths, and marriages within the community. Any citizen can register life events with the Government; however, registration of a religious group allows its officials to act in this capacity as well. While awaiting registration, religious groups had the freedom to meet and worship according to their beliefs. In September 2006 the Islamic Association of St. Lucia, an organization that represents a number of traditions within the Muslim community, successfully registered as a nonprofit organization, but due to the moratorium the Government had yet to register it as a religious group.

The public school curriculum includes Christian education; however, non-Christian students are not required to participate. There also are private schools sponsored by both the Catholic and Anglican churches.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, pertinent to their religious rituals, was illegal.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Some tension existed between the historically dominant Catholic Church and the rapidly growing evangelical groups, some of whom allegedly criticized the Catholic Church during their proselytizing efforts.

In April 2006 a man was remanded to custody, accused of attempting to assassinate the Eastern Caribbean's Catholic Archbishop. At the end of the reporting period, the accused was still in remand as his case was continually postponed.

Although Rastafarian leaders acknowledged that intolerance was gradually decreasing, they complained that discrimination still existed against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 150 square miles and a population of 119,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. According to the 2001 population and housing census, the Anglican Church and Pentecostal congregations each consist of approximately 19,000 members, the Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, and Baptist churches each comprised 11,000 adherents, while 8,000 citizens claim to be Roman Catholic. Other denominations, such as evangelical groups, Church of God, and Jehovah's Witnesses are present in smaller numbers. According to the census, there are approximately 1,500 Rastafarians. Baha'is are present in smaller numbers.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Christian holy days, including Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

Students in public schools receive nondenominational religious instruction based on Christianity; however, students are not forced to participate in religious instruction. Representatives from different religious groups are occasionally invited to speak to students. Most speakers represent the Anglican or Catholic churches. Teachers are also allowed to provide information on other religious groups.

The Government occasionally organizes interfaith services through the Christian Council, an organization comprising the Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist Churches, and the Salvation Army.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, integral to their religious rituals, was illegal.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice; however, Rastafarians complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

Both the Christian Council of Churches and Association of Evangelical Churches conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among different Christian denominations.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

SURINAME

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 493,000. According to the 2004 census, an estimated 27 percent of the inhabitants trace their ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, 18 percent identify themselves as Creoles of African descent, 15 percent claim Indonesian ancestry, and 15 percent are of Maroon descent, or descendants of escaped slaves. Smaller percentages claim Chinese, Amerindian, Portuguese, Lebanese, or Dutch descent.

According to recent census data, 40.7 percent of the population is Christian, including Roman Catholics and other Protestant groups—among them Moravian, Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, Evangelical, Baptist, and Methodist; 20 percent is Hindu, 13.5 percent is Muslim, 3.3 percent follow indigenous religions, 15 percent claim to not know their religion, 4.4 percent claim no faith, and 2.5 percent declare unspecified faiths. Indigenous religions are practiced by the Amerindian and Afro-descendant Maroon populations. Amerindians, found principally in the interior and to a lesser extent in coastal areas, practice shamanism, a worship of all living things, through a medicine man, or piaiman. Maroons, who inhabit the interior, worship nature through a practice that has no special name, and they also worship their ancestors through a rite called wintie. Citizens of Amerindian and Maroon origin who classify themselves as Christian often simultaneously follow indigenous religious customs, with the acknowledgment of their Christian church leaders.

The Jewish community numbers 150, and there are small numbers of Baha'is and Buddhists. Other groups include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the World Islamic Call Society.

Missionaries are present.

Many political parties, including six of the eight governing coalition parties, have strong ethnic ties, and members tend to adhere to or practice one faith. For example, within the governing coalition, the majority of members of the mostly ethnic-Creole National Party of Suriname (NPS) is Moravian, members of the mostly ethnic-Indian United Reformed Party are Hindu, and those of the mostly ethnic-Javanese Pertjaja Luhur Party tend to be Muslim. However, parties have no requirement that political party leaders or members adhere to a particular religion. For example, the President, who is also the leader of the NPS, is a practicing Catholic.

There is no direct correlation between religious affiliation and socioeconomic status; however, those who practice indigenous religions in the small villages of the interior generally have a lower socioeconomic status. With the exception of those following indigenous practices, religious communities are not heavily concentrated in any particular region.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There are 5 holy days that are celebrated as official holidays: Holi Phagwa (Hindu), Good Friday (Christian), Easter Monday (Christian), Eid al-Fitr (Islamic), and Christmas (Christian). Persons of all religious groups tended 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.

Foreign missionaries face no special restrictions. They are subject to the standard requirement of an entry visa.

The armed forces maintain a chaplaincy with Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic clergy available to military personnel of all religious groups. While the chaplaincy provides interfaith services, personnel are also welcome to attend outside religious services.

The Government educational system provides limited subsidies to a number of public elementary and secondary schools established and managed by various religious organizations. While the teachers are civil servants and the schools are public, religious groups provide all funding with the exception of teachers' salaries and a small maintenance stipend. Religious instruction in public schools is permitted but not required. Schools offer religious instruction in a variety of faiths.

Parents are not permitted to homeschool their children for religious or other reasons; however, they may enroll their children in private schools, many of which have a religious affiliation. Students in public schools are allowed to practice all elements of their religion, 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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There is an interreligious council composed of representatives of various religious groups. Council members meet at least twice per month to discuss planned ecumenical activities and their position on Government policies. The council is partially supported by and consults with the state.

SECTION IV. U.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 a regular dialogue with leaders of various religious communities and held three roundtable discussions with interfaith groups.

Following the 2006 controversy and subsequent violence surrounding cartoons in a Danish newspaper depicting the Prophet Muhammad, Embassy officials engaged in a dialogue with one of the largest Islamic organizations in the country to discuss freedom of religion in the context of human rights.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 1.3 million. Approximately 40 percent of the population is of African descent and 40 percent of East Indian descent. The balance is mostly of European, Syrian, Lebanese, or Chinese descent.

According to the latest unofficial estimates (2006), 26 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 24.6 percent 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 Hindu, and 5.8 percent Muslim. A small number of individuals belong to traditional Caribbean religious groups with African roots, such as the Spiritual Baptists (sometimes called Shouter Baptists), 5.4 percent, and the Orisha, 0.1 percent. The smaller groups are Jehovah's Witnesses (1.6 percent) and atheists (1.9 percent). Those listed as "other" account for 10.7 percent, which includes numerous small Christian groups as well as Baha'is, Rastafarians, Buddhists, and Jews.

Afro-Trinidadians are predominantly Christian, with a small Muslim community, and are concentrated in and around Port-of-Spain and the east-west corridor of Trinidad. The population of Trinidad's sister island, Tobago, is overwhelmingly of African descent and predominantly Christian. Indo-Trinidadians are primarily concentrated in central and southern Trinidad and are principally divided between the Hindu and Islamic religious groups, along with significant Presbyterian and some 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 main opposition United National Congress (UNC) party as well as the breakaway opposition Congress of the People (COP) party. Religious overtones were sometimes present in the messages and ceremonies of the PNM and particularly of the UNC, which occasionally incorporated Hindu references and cultural expressions into its public events. However, the COP's professed goal was to focus on issues and embrace all potential voters without reference to race, creed or ethnic origin.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

To receive tax-exempt donations and gifts of land or to perform marriages, religious groups must register with the Government, which requires them to demonstrate that they are nonprofit organizations. Religious groups have the same rights and obligations as most legal entities, regardless of whether they are registered. They can own land, but they must pay property taxes; they can hire employees, but they must pay Government-mandated employee benefits. Some religious groups register their organizations for increased visibility and to attract wider membership.

The Government subsidizes both public and religiously affiliated schools. It permits religious instruction in public schools, setting aside a time each week when any religious organization with an adherent in the school can provide an instructor. Attendance at these classes is voluntary, and the religious groups represented are diverse. Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. Homeschooling is not allowed, since the Education Act mandates formal schooling for all children, whether in public or private schools.

The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for ecclesiastical affairs and administers annual financial grants to religious organizations. It also issues recommendations on land use by such organizations.

The law prohibits acts that would offend or insult another person or group on the grounds of race, origin, or religion, or which would incite racial or religious hatred, and it provides for prosecution of the desecration of any place of worship. Government officials routinely speak out against religious intolerance and generally do not publicly favor any religion. Judicial review is available to those who claim to be victims of religious discrimination.

The Government established public holidays for every religious group with a large following. The Christian holidays are Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas; the Hindu holiday is Divali; and the Islamic holiday is Eid al-Fitr. In addition, the Government recognizes the Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day, associated with the Spiritual Baptist religion. The Government grants financial and technical assistance to various organizations to support religious festivals and celebrations.

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 Development as well as the Ministry of Education in its governmental relations.

Ministers, Members of Parliament, and public figures represented every religious group and denomination and the broad spectrum of religious beliefs in the country. They often participated in the ceremonies and holidays of other religions and actively preached religious tolerance and harmony.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Foreign missionaries operated freely; however, the Government limited the number of foreign missionaries to 30 per religious group at any given time. Missionaries must meet standard requirements for an entry visa and must represent a registered religious group. They may not remain for more than 3 years per visit but may reenter after a year's absence.

Members of the military are 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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Society is multiethnic and multireligious, and religious tolerance is instilled very early in life. Political leaders attended celebrations of all groups and often delivered speeches on religious tolerance that highlight the country's diversity.

The IRO, which was composed of leaders of nearly all religious groups with significant followings, promoted 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 did not participate for doctrinal reasons.

Occasionally, a religious group complained about conversion efforts undertaken in neighborhoods that predominantly belonged to another faith. Most commonly, Hindu religious leaders raised this complaint against evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. These complaints may stem from underlying ethnic tensions 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. The Embassy maintained contacts with most congregations and invited representatives to official functions.

URUGUAY

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

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 3.2 million. While the Government keeps no statistics concerning religious affiliation, a 2004 survey published in the daily newspaper *El Pais* reported that 54 percent of those interviewed designated themselves as Roman Catholics, 6 percent as evangelical Protestants, 5 percent as Protestants, 9 percent as believers without a religious affiliation, and 26 percent as nonbelievers. The mainstream Protestant minority is composed primarily of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other denominations and branches include evangelicals, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Eastern Orthodox, and Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2006 a religious-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) estimated that 400,000 persons considered themselves to be evangelical Protestants. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) claimed 100,000 members.

There are approximately 25,000 Jews. According to local Jewish leaders, since 2002 the number of Jews has declined due to emigration. The estimated 4,000 Baha'is are concentrated primarily in Montevideo. An April 2006 newspaper report indicated that approximately 850 families practice Buddhism. The Unification Church is active and has major property holdings, including a daily newspaper. The Muslim population lives primarily near the border with Brazil. An Islamic cultural representative estimated 300 to 400 Muslims in the country but noted that the majority were minimally observant.

Missionaries were present and reported no difficulties obtaining visas for religious work.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on religion. The penal code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups.

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 5 years. Once the Ministry grants religious status, the group can request an exemption each year from the taxing body, which is usually the municipal government.

The holy days of Three Kings Day, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as official national holidays but with secular names.

Muslims may obtain an optional identity card that identifies their religious affiliation to employers and allows them to leave work early on Fridays, and employers generally respected this practice. While there are no mosques in the country, there are two Islamic Centers: the Egyptian Islamic Center in Montevideo, which is supported by the Egyptian Embassy, and the Uruguay Islamic Center in Canelones. The overall activity at these centers is low, and they serve primarily as social hubs for Muslim immigrants who wish to maintain ties to their culture.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students who belong to minority religious groups to miss school for religious holidays without penalty. There are private religious schools, which are mainly Catholic and Jewish.

Foreign missionaries faced 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 in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Jewish leaders noted a significant increase in the quantity of anti-Semitic graffiti. Police cooperated in investigating these incidents. A Jewish cemetery in Montevideo was vandalized, and anti-Semitic graffiti appeared for the first time in the second largest city. In September 2006 four persons were arrested in connection with anti-Semitic graffiti. Authorities had not resolved the case by the end of the reporting period.

On April 17, 2007, a draft law was unanimously adopted accepting the adoption of International Holocaust Memorial Day as approved by the United Nations in early 2006. The law also condemns any expression of denial of the Holocaust as a historical event.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. The Christian-Jewish Council met regularly to promote interfaith understanding. In addition, the mainstream Protestant denominations met regularly among themselves and with the Catholic Church. There were several NGOs that promoted interfaith understanding.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy staff met with human rights and religious NGOs, including B'nai B'rith and the Israeli Central Committee of Uruguay. They also met with the leaders of religious communities, including rep-

resentatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Muslim community, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Protestant groups.

VENEZUELA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, on the condition that its practice does not violate public morality, decency, or the public order, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There were some efforts by the Government, motivated by political reasons, to limit the influence of religious groups in certain geographic, social, and political areas.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. 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 a population of 27 million. According to Government estimates, 92 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, and the remaining 8 percent is Protestant, practiced other religions, or is atheist. The Venezuelan Evangelical Council estimated that evangelical Protestants constitute approximately 10 percent of the population. A variety of missionary groups are present.

There are small but influential Jewish and Muslim communities. The Jewish community numbers approximately 15,000 and is most active in the capital, Caracas. The Muslim community of more than 100,000 is concentrated among persons of Lebanese and Syrian descent living in Nueva Esparta State and the Caracas area.

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; the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The Directorate of Justice and Religion (DJR) in the Ministry of Interior and Justice is mandated to maintain a registry of religious groups, disburse funds to religious organizations, and promote awareness and understanding among religious communities. Each group must register with the DJR to have legal status as a religious organization. Requirements for registration are largely administrative, the key exception being that groups serve the community's social interests. Some groups have complained that the process is slow and inefficient. There were no accounts of the Government refusing to register certain religious groups in the period covered by this report.

A 1964 concordat governs relations between the Government and the Vatican and provides the basis for Government subsidies to the Roman Catholic Church. All registered religious groups are eligible for funding to support religious services, but most money goes to Catholic organizations. While the Government continued to fund Catholic-operated schools during the period covered by this report, the Government directly funded the Episcopal Conference of Venezuela (CEV) at reduced levels. There were reports of continued Government funding for certain evangelical groups, although much of this was related to social projects implemented via the Government's social programs, and the specific amounts were unavailable.

Foreign missionaries require special visas. Missionaries expressed concern about refusal rates for first-time religious visas and, less frequently, renewals. Some missionary groups also complained that the religious visa process was prone to delays. The Government enforced visa requirements. The Government asked a group of Seventh-day Adventist university students and professors from the United States to cease providing medical care to indigenous persons in the State of Bolivar after the Government determined that the group did not have the proper visas and permits. In April 2007 the group departed the country.

U.S. missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) did not return to the country during the period covered by this report. In 2005 the Mormons withdrew 219 missionaries, citing difficulties in receiving religious visas.

The Government continued to provide annual subsidies to Catholic schools and social programs that help the poor, although such Government subsidies were reduced in some states. Other religious groups are free to establish their own schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution forbids the use of religion to avoid obeying the law or interfere with the rights of others; however, there were efforts by the Government, motivated by political reasons, to limit the influence of the Catholic Church and missionary groups in certain social and political areas. Leaders from a number of religious groups noted that since the reelection of President Chavez on December 6, 2006, the Government has been less open to dialogue.

The Government continued to prohibit foreign missionary groups from working in indigenous areas. In 2005 the Ministry of Interior rescinded permission for the New Tribes Mission (NTM) to conduct its social programs among indigenous tribes; NTM appealed to the Supreme Court, and the case remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. The NTM withdrew more than 100 NTM missionaries from the indigenous areas in compliance with the Government's order. Other foreign missionary groups working in the indigenous areas departed voluntarily.

On March 19, 2007, a Caracas municipal court sentenced Andres Jose Rodriguez Rojas to 15 years in prison for the April 2006 murder of a Catholic priest who worked for the CEV. The Catholic Church and the Government had initially clashed over the handling of this case.

In January 2007 the Government declared its intention to withdraw the broadcast license of NCTV, a regional Catholic Church-affiliated network. The Government and Church leaders reached an agreement by which NCTV continued operating in the states of Zulia and Carabobo but returned to state control other frequencies that NCTV was no longer using. Public confrontation between Catholic bishops and Government officials continued. Vale TV continued to be broadcast as a Catholic-operated station during the period covered by this report.

President Chavez engaged in numerous rhetorical personal attacks on specific Catholic bishops, including during a January 8, 2007, swearing-in ceremony for his new cabinet and his January 10 inauguration address. He specifically warned Catholic bishops to refrain from commenting on political issues. Prior to the December 6, 2006, presidential election, the four senior leaders of the CEV sent President Chavez a letter urging him to respect minorities and to promote harmony, dialogue, and understanding among Venezuelans. During its January 7–13, 2007, meeting with all bishops, the CEV issued communiques urging the Government to respect political pluralism and freedom of expression.

The military chaplain corps consisted almost exclusively of Catholic priests. Although armed forces members of other religious groups were allowed to attend services of their faith, they did not have the same access to clergy members that Catholic service members enjoyed. During 2007 authorities tightly regulated and limited access of evangelical chaplains to prisons. In 2005 the Ministry of Interior and Justice permitted the entry of evangelical chaplains to several of the prisons, positions that formerly had been open only to Catholics.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The President, Government officials, and Government-affiliated media outlets promoted anti-Semitism through numerous anti-Semitic comments that created a spillover effect into mainstream society. There was a rise in anti-Semitic vandalism, caricatures, expressions at rallies, intimidation, and physical attacks against Jewish institutions.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that the President and Government officials expressed anti-Semitic sentiments, blaming Israel and the Jews for the world's problems and utilizing stereotypes about Jewish financial influence and control. In criticizing Israel during the 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, President Chavez made anti-Semitic statements. On August 25, 2006, in Beijing, and again in Doha 3 days later, President Chavez likened Israeli behavior to that of the Nazis and reiterated the theme of genocide. On August 6, 2006, on the television program, *Aló, Presidente*, on Venezolana de Televisión, President Chavez accused Israelis of "applying to the Lebanese people and to the Palestinian people the same treatment they have so criticized about the Holocaust." On July 28, 2006, in

an interview broadcast domestically and on Al-Jazeera television, President Chavez stated that Israel's actions regarding the Palestinians and Lebanon were "perpetrated in the fascist manner of Hitler . . . they are doing what Hitler did to the Jews."

Government-sponsored media outlets utilized anti-Jewish caricatures and political cartoons on several occasions. The local Jewish community expressed strong concerns that such statements and publications fostered a climate permissive to anti-Semitic actions. The hosts of *La Hojilla*, a pro-Chavez talk show on official Government television, made recurring anti-Semitic slurs, and the Government's de facto official daily newspaper, *Vea*, regularly published anti-Semitic comments.

Extremely offensive anti-Semitic graffiti and leaflets appeared on synagogue walls and in Jewish neighborhoods and increased in the Caracas area following the July–August 2006 conflict involving Israel and Hezbollah. Between June and September 2006, buildings associated with the Jewish community were vandalized four times, according to an international Jewish group. Jewish leaders also expressed concern over the Government's close relationship with Iran, whose President called repeatedly for the annihilation of the country of Israel.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

SECTION IV. U.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 maintained close contact with various religious communities. The U.S. Ambassador met regularly with religious authorities and when appropriate sought to raise their concerns with appropriate Government officials. Embassy representatives' access to Government officials was limited.

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.

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of a kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

Article 4

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11

1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense.
2. No one shall be held guilty without any limitation due to race, of any penal offence on account of nationality or religion, have the any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed.

Article 12

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor be denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17

1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration insuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

Hundred and eighty-third plenary meeting
Resolution 217(A)(III) of the United Nations General Assembly,
December 10, 1948

(This material is in the public domain and may be reprinted without permission; citation of this source is appreciated.)

APPENDIX B

INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

and

THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Preamble

The States Parties to the present Covenant,

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Recognizing that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person,

Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his economic, social and cultural rights,

Considering the obligation of States under the Charter of the United Nations to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and freedoms,

Realizing that the individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized in the present Covenant,

Agree upon the following articles:

PART I

Article 1

1. All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination, and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

PART II

Article 2

1. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

2. Where not already provided for by existing legislative or other measures, each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to take the necessary steps, in accordance with its constitutional processes and with the provisions of the present Covenant, to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the present Covenant.

3. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes:

(a) To ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity;

(b) To ensure that any person claiming such a remedy shall have his right thereto determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy;

(c) To ensure that the competent authorities shall enforce such remedies when granted.

Article 3

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present Covenant.

Article 4

1. In time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed, the States Parties to the present Covenant may take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures are not inconsistent with their other obligations under international law and do not involve discrimination solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin.

2. No derogation from articles 6, 7, 8 (paragraphs 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 discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 27

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the

other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

PART IV

Article 28

1. There shall be established a Human Rights Committee (hereafter referred to in the present Covenant as the Committee). It shall consist of eighteen members and shall carry out the functions hereinafter provided.
2. The Committee shall be composed of nationals of the States Parties to the present Covenant who shall be persons of high moral character and recognized competence in the field of human rights, consideration being given to the usefulness of the participation of some persons having legal experience.
3. The members of the Committee shall be elected and shall serve in their personal capacity.

Article 29

1. The members of the Committee shall be elected by secret ballot from a list of persons possessing the qualifications prescribed in article 28 and nominated for the purpose by the States Parties to the present Covenant.
2. Each State Party to the present Covenant may nominate not more than two persons. These persons shall be nationals of the nominating State.
3. A person shall be eligible for renomination.

Article 30

1. The initial election shall be held no later than six months after the date of the entry into force of the present Covenant.
2. At least four months before the date of each election to the Committee, other than an election to fill a vacancy declared in accordance with article 34, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall address a written invitation to the States Parties to the present Covenant to submit their nominations for membership of the Committee within three months.
3. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall prepare a list in alphabetical order of all the persons thus nominated, with an indication of the States Parties which have nominated them, and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Covenant no later than one month before the date of each election.
4. Elections of the members of the Committee shall be held at a meeting of the States Parties to the present Covenant convened by the Secretary General of the United Nations at the Headquarters of the United Nations. At that meeting, for which two thirds of the States Parties to the present Covenant shall constitute a quorum, the persons elected to the Committee shall be those nominees who obtain the largest number of votes and an absolute majority of the votes of the representatives of States Parties present and voting.

Article 31

1. The Committee may not include more than one national of the same State.
2. In the election of the Committee, consideration shall be given to equitable geographical distribution of membership and to the representation of the different forms of civilization and of the principal legal systems.

Article 32

1. The members of the Committee shall be elected for a term of four years. They shall be eligible for re-election if renominated. However, the terms of nine of the members elected at the first election shall expire at the end of two years; immediately after the first election, the names of these nine members shall be chosen by lot by the Chairman of the meeting referred to in article 30, paragraph 4.
2. Elections at the expiry of office shall be held in accordance with the preceding articles of this part of the present Covenant.

Article 33

1. If, in the unanimous opinion of the other members, a member of the Committee has ceased to carry out his functions for any cause other than absence of a temporary character, the Chairman of the Committee shall notify the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall then declare the seat of that member to be vacant.

2. In the event of the death or the resignation of a member of the Committee, the Chairman shall immediately notify the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall declare the seat vacant from the date of death or the date on which the resignation takes effect.

Article 34

1. When a vacancy is declared in accordance with article 33 and if the term of office of the member to be replaced does not expire within six months of the declaration of the vacancy, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall notify each of the States Parties to the present Covenant, which may within two months submit nominations in accordance with article 29 for the purpose of filling the vacancy.

2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall prepare a list in alphabetical order of the persons thus nominated and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Covenant. The election to fill the vacancy shall then take place in accordance with the relevant provisions of this part of the present Covenant.

3. A member of the Committee elected to fill a vacancy declared in accordance with article 33 shall hold office for the remainder of the term of the member who vacated the seat on the Committee under the provisions of that article.

Article 35

The members of the Committee shall, with the approval of the General Assembly of the United Nations, receive emoluments from United Nations resources on such terms and conditions as the General Assembly may decide, having regard to the importance of the Committee's responsibilities.

Article 36

The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee under the present Covenant.

Article 37

1. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall convene the initial meeting of the Committee at the Headquarters of the United Nations.

2. After its initial meeting, the Committee shall meet at such times as shall be provided in its rules of procedure.

3. The Committee shall normally meet at the Headquarters of the United Nations or at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Article 38

Every member of the Committee shall, before taking up his duties, make a solemn declaration in open committee that he will perform his functions impartially and conscientiously.

Article 39

1. The Committee shall elect its officers for a term of two years. They may be reelected.

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 mat-

ter which is the subject of a communication already transmitted under this article; no further communication by any State Party shall be received after the notification of withdrawal of the declaration has been received by the Secretary-General, unless the State Party concerned has made a new declaration.

Article 42

1. (a) If a matter referred to the Committee in accordance with article 41 is not resolved to the satisfaction of the States Parties concerned, the Committee may, with the prior consent of the States Parties concerned, appoint an ad hoc Conciliation Commission (hereinafter referred to as the Commission). The good offices of the Commission shall be made available to the States Parties concerned with a view to an amicable solution of the matter on the basis of respect for the present Covenant;

(b) The Commission shall consist of five persons acceptable to the States Parties concerned. If the States Parties concerned fail to reach agreement within three months on all or part of the composition of the Commission, the members of the Commission concerning whom no agreement has been reached shall be elected by secret ballot by a two-thirds majority vote of the Committee from among its members.

2. The members of the Commission shall serve in their personal capacity. They shall not be nationals of the States Parties concerned, or of a State not Party to the present Covenant, or of a State Party which has not made a declaration under article 41.

3. The Commission shall elect its own Chairman and adopt its own rules of procedure.

4. The meetings of the Commission shall normally be held at the Headquarters of the United Nations or at the United Nations Office at Geneva. However, they may be held at such other convenient places as the Commission may determine in consultation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the States Parties concerned.

5. The secretariat provided in accordance with article 36 shall also service the commissions appointed under this article.

6. The information received and collated by the Committee shall be made available to the Commission and the Commission may call upon the States Parties concerned to supply any other relevant information.

7. When the Commission has fully considered the matter, but in any event not later than twelve months after having been seized of the matter, it shall submit to the Chairman of the Committee a report for communication to the States Parties concerned:

(a) If the Commission is unable to complete its consideration of the matter within twelve months, it shall confine its report to a brief statement of the status of its consideration of the matter;

(b) If an amicable solution to the matter on 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 RELIGION OR BELIEF

The General Assembly,

Considering that one of the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations is that of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, and that all Member States have pledged themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organization to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion,

Considering that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights proclaim the principles of nondiscrimination and equality before the law and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief,

Considering that the disregard and infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or whatever belief, have brought, directly or indirectly, wars and great suffering to mankind, especially where they serve as a means of foreign interference in the internal affairs of other States and amount to kindling hatred between peoples and nations,

Considering that religion or belief, for anyone who professes either, is one of the fundamental elements in his conception of life and that freedom of religion or belief should be fully respected and guaranteed,

Considering that it is essential to promote understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion and belief and to ensure that the use of religion or belief for ends inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, other relevant instruments of the United Nations and the purposes and principles of the present Declaration is inadmissible,

Convinced that freedom of religion and belief should also contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples and to the elimination of ideologies or practices of colonialism and racial discrimination,

Noting with satisfaction the adoption of several, and the coming into force of some, conventions, under the aegis of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies, for the elimination of various forms of discrimination,

Concerned by manifestations of intolerance and by the existence of discrimination in matters of religion or belief still in evidence in some areas of the world,

Resolved to adopt all necessary measures for the speedy elimination of such intolerance in all its forms and manifestations and to prevent and combat discrimination on the ground of religion or belief,

Proclaims this Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief:

Article 1

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 2

1. No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on the grounds of religion or other belief.

2. For the purposes of the present Declaration, the expression "intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief" means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

Article 3

Discrimination between human being on the grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enunciated in detail in the International Covenants on Human Rights, and as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations.

Article 4

1. All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.

2. All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.

Article 5

1. The parents or, as the case may be, the legal guardians of the child have the right to organize the life within the family in accordance with their religion or belief and bearing in mind the moral education in which they believe the child should be brought up.

2. Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.

3. The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the ground of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for freedom of

religion or belief of others, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

4. In the case of a child who is not under the care either of his parents or of legal guardians, due account shall be taken of their expressed wishes or of any other proof of their wishes in the matter of religion or belief, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.

5. Practices of a religion or belief in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development, taking into account article 1, paragraph 3, of the present Declaration.

Article 6

In accordance with article I of the present Declaration, and subject to the provisions of article 1, paragraph 3, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief shall include, inter alia, the following freedoms:

(a) To worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes;

(b) To establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions;

(c) To make, acquire and use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief;

(d) To write, issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas;

(e) To teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes;

(f) To solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions;

(g) To train, appoint, elect or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief;

(h) To observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief;

(i) To establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels.

Article 7

The rights and freedoms set forth in the present Declaration shall be accorded in national legislation in such a manner that everyone shall be able to avail himself of such rights and freedoms in practice.

Article 8

Nothing in the present Declaration shall be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

APPENDIX C

TRAINING AT THE FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE RELATED TO THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT

I. Summary

Under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRF Act), the Department of State is tasked with training Foreign Service Officers in both human rights broadly and religious freedom specifically. The Department of State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) works closely with the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF), in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), to integrate 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. State Department officers from DRL and IRF regularly participate in FSI courses to brief students in area and professional studies courses, and individual briefings with FSI students on their specific portfolios. DRL and IRF officers routinely cover topics such as the international basis and standards for the right to freedom of religion, the theological beliefs of different religious groups, state actions against religious groups and other manifestations of violations of religious freedom, involvement of religious groups in politics, diplomatic tools used by the United States to promote respect for religious freedom, venues for protection of those who have fled religious persecution, and the relationships between religious freedom, democracy, and national security. FSI periodically consults with the staff of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to ensure the currency of its offerings in this area.

II. Courses Offered

The School of Professional and Area Studies (SPAS) at FSI offers training relevant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) in a variety of courses. The following are brief descriptions of courses offered by the divisions of Political Training, Orientation, Consular Training, and Area Studies.

FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER ORIENTATION (A–100)

During the A-100 Course, a senior State Department official from DRL presents a session on international religious freedom. Commissioners from the Commission on International Religious Freedom are also invited to speak to each A-100 class. Students are provided key background materials on religious freedom on a CD distributed to each officer. They are also directed to key websites containing related materials.

POLITICAL/ECONOMIC TRADECRAFT (PG–140)

This is a 3-week 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. Political/Economic Tradecraft is a required course, in that State Department officers are assigned to take it by the personnel system and exceptions are rare. The State Department expects that a large proportion of these officers/students during their careers will be directly responsible for preparing their post's human rights and religious freedom reports.

As part of required consultations during the course, each student is asked to obtain the Annual Report on Religious Freedom and the report of the Commission on International Religious Freedom listed in Section III. In addition, DRL teaches a session in which religious freedom issues feature prominently. Students are pro-

vided with key background materials on religious freedom on a course CD distributed to each officer. They are also directed to key websites containing related materials.

GLOBAL ISSUES (PP–510)

This 3-day course is given twice a year and is geared toward mid-level foreign affairs and national security professionals working for the Department of State and other agencies. In the fall, this course is combined with a separate module on human rights.

As in the Tradecraft courses, DRL provides presentations in which religious freedom issues are featured together with other aspects of U.S. human rights policy.

BASIC CONSULAR COURSE (PC–530)

PC-530 is a prerequisite for serving as a Consular Officer in the Foreign Service. It is designed primarily for Foreign Service 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.

The Immigrant Visa portion of PC-530 addresses refugee and asylum issues as they pertain to consular officers. Role playing and other scenarios involving religious minorities have been incorporated into the American Citizen Services portion of the course. In addition, the Consular Training Division has completed development of a new lecture for the Interviewing portion of the course that addresses unusual and sensitive cases that may show up at the visa window. One of the specific scenarios in this lecture covers applicants who may potentially qualify for refugee status due to religious persecution. This lecture was fully integrated into the course by the end of July 2007.

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 DRL, ensure that their courses address both regional and country-specific issues of religion, religious freedom, and human rights. Participants receive substantial information encompassing the full range of issues affecting particular regions, including religious freedom and human rights, religious history, and religious traditions. Students also receive reading lists (and Internet guidance) that direct them to even more detailed material.

AMBASSADORIAL TRAINING

The Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs regularly speaks to the Ambassadorial Seminar on the importance of this topic.

III. Background Material on Religious Freedom

The following background materials related to religious freedom are made available (as hard copy or through website address) to FSI students:

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

BACKGROUND MATERIALS PROVIDED TO STUDENTS AT FSI

- Main Internet Web Page of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, www.state.gov/g/drl/irf
- Mission Statement for the Office of International Religious Freedom
- Annual Reports on International Religious Freedom from 1999 through the present
- Fact Sheets on the designation of Countries of Particular Concern
- Department statements on religious freedom, specific to various countries
- Remarks of State Department principals on religious freedom

- History of the Office of International Religious Freedom
- Background on the State Department's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad
- Main Intranet Web Page of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, available only to State Department officials
- Links to legal documents and databases bearing on religious freedom, including the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998
- Other policy papers and resources for researching religious freedom issues
- Instructions for preparation of the upcoming Annual Report on International Religious Freedom
- Main Web Page of the independent, Congressionally funded U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, www.uscirf.gov
- List of current members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
- Annual 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)

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 the Fiscal Year 2006, as required under Section 102 (b)(1)(E) of IRFA.

I. Training of Asylum Officers and Refugee Adjudicators

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) provides extensive training to Asylum Officers to prepare them to perform their duties of adjudicating asylum claims. The training covers all grounds on which an asylum claim may be based, including religion. Asylum Officers receive approximately 5 weeks of specialized training related to international human rights law, nonadversarial interview techniques, and other relevant national and international refugee laws and principles.[1] During the 5-week course and in local asylum office training, USCIS provides Asylum Officers with specialized training on religious persecution issues. With the passage of IRFA in 1998, the 5-week training program expanded to incorporate information about IRFA as a part of the regular curriculum. A staff member from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) participated in each of the two training courses held in FY 2006. In addition, a continual effort is made to include further discussion of religious persecution whenever possible in both the 5-week course and in local asylum office training. The Asylum Division regularly updates its training materials and conducts training in local asylum offices to reflect any recently issued papers on religious persecution from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, USCIRF, or other organizations, as well as any recent developments in case law or country conditions on this issue. Furthermore, in Fiscal Year 2006, the Asylum Division piloted in one of the field Asylum Offices a half-day training module on issues of religious persecution and included as one of the presenters a USCIRF staff member. This module is being developed further for use in all field Asylum Offices.

As mandated by IRFA, USCIS provides specialized training to refugee officers. The Refugee Application Adjudication Course (RAAC) consists of 2 weeks of intensive instruction in refugee law and overseas refugee processing procedures, paying special attention to religious persecution issues. USCIS officers responsible for adjudicating refugee applications were required to attend the course. The refugee law portion of RAAC was largely adapted from the Asylum Officer Basic Training Course (AOBTC) with new modules developed specifically for overseas refugee processing.

In addition, new refugee officers must successfully complete the Refugee Officer Training Course (ROTC) to conduct overseas refugee adjudications. The course consists of in-depth training on refugee law, and much of the material is drawn from the AOBTC. This 3 week training covers all grounds, including religion, on which a claim for refugee status may be based and involves specialized training on international human rights law, nonadversarial interview techniques, and other relevant

[1] Asylum Officers are required to complete two 5-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.

national and international refugee laws and principles. During the training, students receive specialized instruction on religious persecution issues. For example, as part of the last two sessions, USCIRF members conduct presentations on IRFA. In addition, the training encourages further discussion of religious persecution whenever possible. USCIS has updated the primary lesson plan to reflect recent guidelines issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on religious persecution claims, as well as recent developments in refugee law. More than 30 officers have completed the training to date.

In addition to ROTC, USCIS also provides preparatory training to officers who are embarking on short-term, overseas refugee-related assignments. This training includes detailed information on religious topics that will be encountered on the overseas assignment.

The Resource Information Center (RIC) in the Asylum Division of the Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate serves both asylum officers and refugee adjudicators and is responsible for the collection, 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. This online internet guide includes links to government and nongovernmental websites that contain information on religious persecution, as well as other issues relevant to asylum adjudications. The RIC separately catalogs religious freedom periodicals and separately codes RIC responses to field queries that involve religious issues.

II. Guidelines for Addressing Hostile Biases

In the affirmative asylum context, applicants for asylum who cannot proceed with the asylum interview in English must provide their own interpreter. Prior to conducting any interpretation for the interview, the interpreter must take an oath to translate fully and accurately the proceedings of the asylum interview. The asylum officer may terminate the interview to be rescheduled at a later date if the interpreter is found to be misrepresenting the applicant's testimony, is incompetent, or otherwise displays improper conduct.

USCIS includes specific antibias provisions in the interpreter 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. Asylum Officers report to the Asylum Division any concerns about the accuracy or neutrality of the interpretation, which in turn are raised to the management of the interpreter services company.

APPENDIX E

OVERVIEW OF U.S. REFUGEE POLICY

The world's refugee population is estimated to be some 9 million persons per United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data for the end of calendar year 2006. Nearly 24 million 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 (NGOs) to protect refugees, internally displaced persons, and conflict victims, and strives to ensure that basic human needs for food, health care, water and sanitation, education, and shelter are met. The United States has been instrumental in mobilizing a community of nations to work through these organizations to protect and assist refugees worldwide, supporting major humanitarian relief operations and seeking durable solutions for refugees. For the vast majority of refugees, voluntary return to their homelands is the preferred solution. Where voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity is not feasible, other durable solutions are sought, including local integration in countries of asylum or resettlement in third countries.

Resettlement, including in 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 from, 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. The following describes the program's efforts, by region, in meeting the needs of refugees worldwide who have faced religious persecution.

The U.S. admissions program processes refugee cases referred by UNHCR, U.S. Embassies, and certain NGOs and works closely with them to strengthen this referral process.

Africa

For the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, religious freedom is the norm, even where other conflicts hold sway or where there has been communal violence along sectarian lines as in Nigeria. The primary exceptions have been Sudan and Eritrea.

During the 22-year civil war between "North" and "South" the Government of Sudan 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. Although the conflict in Darfur involves human rights abuses based on ethnic differences, it lacks the religious dimensions of the North-South conflict. With the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the North-South conflict, an interim National Constitution entered into force that includes specific religious freedom guarantees. The country remains in a state of political transition; however, the Government of National Unity has continued to impose restrictions on non-Muslims in the north, while permitting the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) to develop a secular administration respecting the rights of Christians, Muslims, and others in the south. During Fiscal Year 2006, 1,848 Sudanese refugees who had found refuge in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kenya (primarily) were resettled in the United States. With the end of the North-South conflict and the current peace prospects in southern Sudan, efforts are now focused primarily on repatriation of refugees to Southern Sudan. However, UNHCR continues to refer a limited number of Sudanese

refugees in need of protection for consideration by the U.S refugee admissions program.

The Government of Eritrea continues to engage in systematic and egregious violations of religious freedom, including harassing, arresting, and detaining members of independent evangelical groups (including Pentecostals), Jehovah's Witnesses, and a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church. It also sought greater control over the four approved religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, and Islam. Often detainees held for their religious affiliations were not formally charged, accorded due process, or allowed access to their families, and some are reportedly held in harsh conditions that include extreme temperature fluctuations. While many were ostensibly jailed for evasion of military conscription, significant numbers were being held solely for their religious beliefs. Eritrea was one of the four countries of origin (together with Somalia, Burundi, and Liberia) that account for the majority of refugee arrivals to the United States in FY 2007.

East Asia

While many governments in East Asia permit freedom of worship, religious believers face serious persecution in some countries. The Department of State has designated Burma, China, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as "Countries of Particular Concern" for systematic, egregious, and ongoing violations of religious freedom.

Genuine religious freedom does not exist in the DPRK. Consistent with the intent of the North Korean Human Rights Act, the United States has recently resettled some North Korean refugees in the United States.

The Government of China either prohibits or severely restricts independent religious activities. The Government continues to suppress, intimidate, harass, detain, and imprison some followers of those religions or spiritual movements not registered with the Government, most notably the (underground) Catholic Church loyal to the Vatican, Protestant "house churches," some Muslim groups, Buddhists loyal to the Dalai Lama, and the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

In Burma the government maintains a pervasive internal security apparatus that generally infiltrates or monitors meetings and activities of all organizations, including religious groups. The government actively promotes Buddhism over other religions as a means of boosting its own legitimacy and continues harsh discrimination against members of minority religions.

In Vietnam there have been a number of significant improvements in law and practice over the past 2 years, and a vast majority of Vietnamese who wish to practice their religion do so freely, without harassment or interference. However, official oversight of recognized religions and harassment or repression of followers of some nonrecognized religions continues. Some religious practitioners, especially ethnic minorities in the Northwest Highlands, continue to suffer harassment, arbitrary detention, and physical intimidation, although reports of such incidents have declined. Vietnam has released a number of religious prisoners, but others face administrative and civil restrictions. In Laos Protestants in particular suffer occasional arrest and imprisonment.

Europe and Central Asia

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 post-Soviet states. Most of these states regulate religious groups and activities, specifying a set of "traditional" religions with certain privileges denied to other groups. They require registration and use this as a mechanism of control; by refusing to register new denominations they make such groups vulnerable to charges of illegal association.

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. The Department of State continues to work with the UNHCR, NGOs (both faith-based and nonsectarian), human rights groups, and U.S. diplomatic missions to identify refugees for whom resettlement is appropriate, including persons who qualify under the 1980 act on religious grounds. 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.

Eastern Europe

In Belarus, and to a lesser degree in Russia, some minority religious groups suffer harassment and difficulties finding places to meet. In Belarus groups with international ties are sometimes accused of being security threats. In Russia there were indications that the security services treated the leadership of some groups as security threats. In some countries one's faith may be associated with ethnicity, patriotism, nationalism, or even with terrorism; and authorities may be suspicious of religious groups perceived as having political agendas and organizations.

Central Asia

In the case of Uzbekistan, members of Islamic groups not approved by the State are often seen as potential terrorists and suffer harassment or imprisonment; members of Christian groups with ethnic Uzbek members are seen as politically and socially destabilizing and also suffer severe harassment. In the case of Turkmenistan, although the level of harassment has decreased, the Government continues to restrict all forms of religious expression.

South Asia

Repression of religious minorities is common in some countries in South Asia. In Pakistan discriminatory legislation persists, and the Government fails to take action against religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities, including Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, and Zikris. In India the central Government sometimes does not act swiftly to counter either societal attacks against religious minorities or attempts by some state and local governments to limit religious freedom. In Afghanistan, despite constitutional guarantees, religious freedom is limited because of legislative ambiguity, a developing judiciary, and deference to local interpretations of Shari'a Law. Years of weak democratic institutions have contributed to intolerance manifested in acts of harassment against reform-minded Muslims and religious minorities. The Department of State continues efforts to improve access to refugee processing through dialogue with NGOs 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.

Near East

Repression of religious minorities is common in the Near East. In Saudi Arabia public non-Muslim worship is prohibited, as is conversion of a Muslim to another religion. In Iran members of minority religious groups continue to face arrest, harassment, and discrimination. In 2004 Congress passed a law that adds "members of a religious minority in Iran" to the list of categories of aliens who, in refugee processing, may benefit from reduced evidentiary standards for demonstrating a well-founded fear of persecution. Iranians who belong to religious minorities (Baha'is, Sufis, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians) are able to apply directly for U.S. resettlement processing.

The UNHCR and U.S. Embassies in the region facilitate access to the admissions program for individuals of other nationalities, including those who may qualify on religious grounds. The UNHCR also has addressed religious persecution issues in several regional workshops.

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. The Government 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 activity 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.